

THE
AESTHETIC
— OF —
JOHANN SEBASTIAN
BACH



André Pirro

Translated by Joe Armstrong

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FOREWORD

As the study of text-music relations in Bach's music has become increasingly sophisticated, it is easy to dismiss early ventures in the field as facile. Among these are Albert Schweitzer's *J. S. Bach le musicien poète* (1905) and André Pirro's *L'Esthétique de Jean-Sébastien Bach* (1907). Of the two, Schweitzer's is the better known, no doubt because it appeared almost immediately in both German and English translations (1908 and 1911, respectively) and has been steadily reprinted since then.

It is unfortunate that Pirro is so little known in the English-speaking world. In 1957, when Mervyn Savill translated André Pirro's 1906 biography of J. S. Bach, he wrote:

André Pirro (1869–1943) is considered one of the most important figures in the field of musicology of our time. Born in Saint-Dizier, France, he studied law and letters and attended the organ classes of César Franck at the Paris Conservatory. Later a member of the directing committee of the Schola Cantorum, in 1912 he succeeded Romain Rolland as Professor of Musical History at the Sorbonne. Of Pirro, *A Dictionary of Modern Music and Musicians* says: "The historic and artistic value of his works and the spirit animating them reveal him as one of the most striking personalities among musicologists."

Pirro's 1906 biography of Bach grew out of his early interest in the organ. The very next year he completed *L'Esthétique de Jean-Sébastien Bach* as a dissertation for the University of Paris. Three subsequent books confirmed Pirro as a leader in modern French musicology: *Dietrich Buxtehude* (Paris, 1913/R), *Schütz* (Paris, 1913/R), and *Les clavecinistes: étude critique* (Paris, 1924/R). Other publications demonstrate an interest in early music. The last and most significant of these is *Histoire de la musique de la fin du XIV^e siècle à la fin du XVI^e* (Paris, 1940).

For a time Pirro's *L'Esthétique de Jean-Sébastien Bach* was out of print; then it became available again in the Minkoff Reprint series (1973).¹ While Schweitzer's work has been characterized as overly fanciful and even confusing,² Pirro's work has usually been praised by those who are familiar with it. As early as 1909 Ebenezer Prout wrote:

It is scarcely saying too much to say that M. Pirro seems to be acquainted with nearly every bar of Bach's music. In proof of this it may be said that of Bach's 190 [*sic*] church cantatas, no fewer than 182 are either quoted in the work or referred to in a way which proves that the author is perfectly familiar with them.³

This English translation will allow Pirro's contribution to the understanding of text-music relations in the music of Bach to receive the wider attention that it has long deserved. While some of Pirro's assertions must be reconsidered in the light of more recent scholarship, many are still worthy of careful consideration. English readers will appreciate the fluency of this translation and the attention paid to detail—the addition of measure numbers to Pirro's original music examples is particularly welcome.

MELVIN UNGER, DIRECTOR
RIEMENSCHNEIDER BACH INSTITUTE

¹ See review by Paul Brainard, *Early Music* 14/4 (1986): 587.

² See, for example. Walter Emery's comments in "Bach's Symbolic Language," *Music and Letters* 30/4 (1949): 345–54.

³ "André Pirro's *L'Esthétique de Jean-Sébastien Bach*," *Monthly Musical Record* 39 (1909): 53, as quoted in Samuel Baron, "Bach's Text Settings: Schweitzer and Pirro Revisited." *A Bach Tribute: Essays in Honor of William H. Scheide*, eds. Paul Brainard and Ray Robinson (Kassel/Chapel Hill: Bärenreiter/Hinshaw, 1993), 21.

PIRRO'S LEGACY TO MUSICIANS

Translator's Preface to the Second Printing

My interest in translating this 1907 book—*L'Esthétique de Jean-Sébastien Bach*, by the French scholar and organist André Pirro (1869–1943)—stems from an essay given to me in 1993 by fellow flutist Sue-Ellen Hershman-Tcherepnin: “Bach’s Text Settings: Schweitzer and Pirro Revisited.” It was written by her friend and former teacher, the late flutist and director of the Bach Aria Group, Samuel Baron, whose conviction that Pirro was “a passionate pursuer of the true and essential nature of Bach’s expression” was borne out when I read *L'Esthétique* for myself. As a longtime player and ardent admirer of Bach’s music, I found this uniquely powerful and beautiful work to have something quite important to offer beyond its relevance to the field of musicology. I came to see that it can lead performers and listeners into a continually deepening experience of Bach’s music from moment to moment as they are playing it or listening to it. The profusion of musical examples and the logic of their presentation alone can serve as a touchstone for honoring Pablo Casals’s exhortation: “An artist has imagination and fantasy, and when he gives himself to music he ought to feel and see things, however vague and indefinite the vision.” Taking in *L'Esthétique* helps me feel and see more fully and deeply the expressive aspects of every Bach piece I encounter, and my main hope is that the book will do something of the same for everyone who absorbs its message.

The value of having an English translation of *L'Esthétique* was confirmed for me not only by Samuel Baron’s article but also through personal correspondence with such noted musical figures as conductors John Eliot Gardiner and Martin Pearlman; Bach scholars Melvin Unger and Raymond Erickson; and composer John Harbison. However, when delving into the book’s history, I discovered that even though some English-speaking writers on Bach consider it to be a major

contribution to the study of his music, most—if they refer to Pirro at all—usually do so only in passing and couple this work with Albert Schweitzer’s largely discredited *J. S. Bach* (original French version, 1905; German version, 1908; English version, 1911). Others who know Pirro’s name seem not to distinguish his *L’Esthétique* from his biography of Bach (1906; English version, 1957), or to realize that his examination in *L’Esthétique* of modes of musical expression is as rigorous as it is—particularly in revealing the correspondences between text and music in Bach’s vocal works and in using those correspondences to illuminate the expressive content of his purely instrumental works. As I worked on the translation, it became ever clearer that this close scrutiny of the elements of Bach’s aesthetic should reward all readers of English who come to his music, whether they share Bach’s religious faith or are “nondoctrinal” listeners for whom the music’s “reality overflows its doctrine”—to borrow from Rosanna Warren’s suggestion for a way to approach religious art in her discussion of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

A full grasp of *L’Esthétique* as originally published requires not only a fluency in French but also enough command of German to perceive the intimate correlations between words and notes in the book’s musical examples—correlations that idiomatic translations do not always reveal. Fortunately, word-for-word English translations of most of these vocal works are available in Melvin Unger’s *Handbook to Bach’s Sacred Cantata Texts*, and they are used here to elucidate the core of Pirro’s study. These word-for-word versions are also supplemented, when necessary, with Mr. Unger’s idiomatic translations of the same texts. Other translations of German, Latin, Greek, Italian, and French music theory are either my own or are from collaborations with friends. Corrections and slight changes have been made to improve the flow of this Duende Editions printing, but the text remains essentially the same as that of the original Rowman & Littlefield edition.

More recent writing on Bach—particularly biographical writing—may correct discrepancies in chronology and in the limited biographical and historical detail Pirro includes in this volume. But I believe that his central thesis about the nature of Bach’s compositional method and the ideas flowing from this thesis are as insightful today as they were in 1907. They validate Casals’s declaration: “Bach being the universal genius, there is no emotion that has not been expressed by him except stinginess, meanness and all that is incompatible with a noble mind.”

Acknowledgments and Sources

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Samuel Baron's praise for Pirro appears in *A Bach Tribute: Essays in Honor of William H. Scheide*, ed. P. Brainard and R. Robinson (Chapel Hill: Hinshaw Music, 1993), 23. Casals is quoted by J. Ma. Corredor in *Conversations with Casals* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1956), 110, 194, quoted with permission from Penguin Random House.. Rosanna Warren's comment on religious art appears in *Fables of the Self* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 216–217, quoted with permission from W. W. Norton. Melvin Unger's *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts* is published by Scarecrow Press (Lanham, MD: 1996), quoted with permission from Rowman & Littlefield. Raul da Gama's comment on this translation from his review "In The Finding of a Masterpiece" from *The World Music Report*, September 3 1014 is quoted with Mr. da Gama's permission.

For revising Pirro's citations of Bach's works and providing their movement and measure numbers, I have relied on the DVD-ROM edition of *The Digital Bach Edition of The Bach Gesellschaft* (CD Sheet Music, LLC: 2005). For the needed correction of first performance dates of Bach's works I have cited Malcolm Boyd's *Bach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). And for giving the corrected sources of compositions formerly attributed to Bach, I have used Melvin Unger's *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts* (Lanham, MD: 1996).

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JOE ARMSTRONG

INTRODUCTION

Difficulty of judging early music. – Ignorance of musical forms of the past and their expressions. – Prejudices of modern musicians. – Double aspect of the works of Bach: master of technique and powerful orator. – Necessity of first delving deeply into his compositions rendered with words. – Method and plan of this study. – Bach and his predecessors. – Bach according to Bach. – How to arrive at establishing his aesthetic.

Music has the power to fill our whole soul—awakening it at the same time as charming it. We need only hear a few bars before the delight they bring begins to move our spirits and enliven our minds. Even the faintest murmur of notes can inspire a response from our senses, and, as long as these notes remain organized, they can captivate our intellects as well.

In fact, in order to follow the development of themes in a musical composition, we must apply ourselves just as if we were verifying a series of propositions deduced from an established theorem. Looking for and recognizing the motifs announced at the beginning of a piece immediately gives us intellectual satisfaction, and pursuing them through a flowing mass of harmonies and secondary subjects that obscure them is an inventive and reflective game that we could not play without a certain degree of careful concentration.

When we try hard to recognize the reappearances of phrases that have struck us at the start of a piece—disentangling them from amidst the accompanying parts, sometimes only guessing at them, amazed at meeting some of their features again—we start to perceive something of the composer's plan, and we prepare ourselves for understanding it. We have fathomed it through intuition if we have come to anticipate the return of the main motif or if we have begun to foresee its chain of consecutive renderings. When this happens, we believe intellectually that the composition's design is clearer to us, and we end up being gripped by a keen mental excitement. We not only feel that we are present at the building of the

musical structure, but we also have the illusion of taking part—of contributing to it in some measure and of collaborating with the composer.

This absorbing work doesn't leave our other faculties idle either. Memory comes particularly into play, because if we don't keep in mind the sound of the first motifs we hear, the thread of the composition is broken. We lose all means of knowing how these successively perceived sonorous figures connect if they fade into the background right after they appear. We no longer have any basis for comparison between them, and the layout of the whole work, made of these fleeting forms, remains inconceivable for us if we don't recall each of them. If we forget only one motif, the piece will be no more to us than an imperfect, often incomprehensible, construction. The monument of imagination that the composer erects before us will tumble in ruins piece by piece right while it is being built if its most important lines do not remain in our memory.

Even if we only wonder what it is in a work that moves us without attempting to analyze it rigorously, we must still rely on the intellectual decisions we make about it. Actually, it is very rare that we immediately understand with any precision what the composer wishes to express. It is usually an exception if his intentions appear to us right away, because so much is unforeseen in our first hearing of a piece that we don't quite know how to determine its meaning. We are very often astonished by it rather than carried away, so that spontaneity and clarity of emotion are quite rare; and while the work unfolds, it can sometimes trouble us more than it moves us. It can make us uneasy, leaving our hearts tentative as long as our minds remain undecided, and these uncertainties can even cloud our impressions and make us feel uncomfortable and anxious until the moment we believe we finally understand what the composer is saying to us. In our ignorance of his language, we cannot know his intentions or reach the understanding that he seeks to create between our souls and his own, and our doubt and distraction keep us from enjoying what is most profound in the work.

This understanding that helps us fully relish expressive music should also keep us from trying to look for emotion in lifeless music, for there is an impassive type of musical craft that offers only a sort of technical pleasure or purely intellectual satisfaction. Feeling has no place in it and is intentionally avoided. Such pieces function only as well-regulated developments of carefully and precisely proportioned figures, and it would be senseless to attribute feelings to them that can be readily aroused. So a very reliable critical method and a great deal of discretion are indispensable if we are to avoid going astray in the delicate task of deciphering the meaning of a musical work.

Difficulty of Judging Early Music

We have even more difficulty making up our minds when examining compositions from the past. Sometimes it can seem that they have lost a vital

source of their beauty—the character that invigorated them and made them communicate something. We might think that time has passed down their outward appearance to us without bequeathing us their charm, as if they stood before us like dried-up flowers, their fragrance vanished; and we are astonished to learn that they enchanted those for whom they bloomed. Even though we still regard them with some curiosity and we study them, very few of us really know how to enjoy them. So, to experience the life-force of this older music, we must recreate in ourselves something of the souls of the listeners for whom they were intended; and for this we need both a certain kind of intuitiveness and the help of reliable commentaries. Appreciating early music has always been subject to peculiar errors because of our imprecise knowledge of it, and especially because of our lack of intuition regarding it. The judgments held during different eras of musical art about compositions from earlier times often reveal a strange combination of injustice and ignorance. Not only do later musicians tend to abandon older works, but previous admiration often changes very quickly to disdain. Quite often, the delight from meeting new works inspires a disrespectful aversion to those of the past. For instance, in the time of Louis XIV, polyphonic works from the Renaissance were considered monuments of barbarity. Nothing in them seduced these later lovers of an easy, cheerful art of tender pathos and clear intentions expressed beneath pleasantly varied exteriors. Even Lully's contemporaries felt his music contained tangled vocal lines, a complicated air, a heavy, monotonous pace, and a rugged surface. In their opinion, his pieces were long, slow, boring, and empty. Or take Orlando di Lasso,¹ for example, who dazzled his contemporaries and was celebrated as the most able and expressive composer of his day. In 1567, Joachim à Burck praised his talent for truthfully expressing the passions,² and to Ronsard he was the “more than divine Orlando.”³ The cardinal of Perron (1556–1618) held in esteem di Lasso's “great naiveté”—that is to say, the naturalness and the emotional sincerity of his music.⁴ And here is how his work is referred to in Lecerf de la Viéville's dialogues published at the beginning of the 18th century, where one of the characters—the knight—is speaking of the illustrious master of yesteryear: “One must have lived with music as much as I have in order to know him . . . I once heard a mass of his that was sung from time to time and that has long notes lasting three and four measures. This mass, which seemed respectable to me mainly because of its antiquity, is in eight movements, although it would have been better if there were only four. It is well known among musicians that it was brought by the cardinal of

¹ [Alternative names for the composer are Orlande de Lassus, Roland de Lassus, Orlandus Lassus, and Roland Delattre.—Trans.]

² *Vere scit affectus exprimere*, wrote Joachim à Burck (Joachim Moller von Burck)—then organist at Mülhausen in Thuringia—in the preface to *Decades IIII sententiosorum versuum celebrium vivorum Germaniae, musicis harmoniis accommodatae* (Mühlhausen: 1567).

³ Preface to Pierre de Ronsard's *Mélange de Chansons* . . . (Paris: Leroy et Ballard, 1572).

⁴ Cardinal Jacques Davy de Perron, *Perroniana, sive excerpta ex ore cardinalis Perronii* (Geneva: 1669), 225.

Lorraine to be sung at the Council of Trent, and while it seemed to please the Italian prelates, they nevertheless made light of it, but I guarantee you that it is deep and serious.”⁵

All of the great di Lasso’s important qualities are misunderstood in this critique, which accurately represents the general opinion of his works among the French of that later period.⁶

Ignorance of Musical Forms of the Past and their Expressions

Very often, admiration for masters of the past is no more enlightened or more judicious than what we find in such comments. Spurned in the 18th century, the masters of polyphony returned to favor in the 19th, but the devotion accorded them was sometimes oddly mixed with ignorance. Among the tributes they received from newly faithful devotees, we also find quasi-blasphemous praises. For example, it is amusing to review the judgments about Palestrina during that later century. Those who resurrected his name continually associated it with the names of Pergolesi and Clari, creating an unjustifiable relationship between these three composers who have nothing in common but their homeland.⁷ In our day, when Palestrina’s compositions have been so happily revived, his unusual art has produced many preposterous reviews, and we sometimes find farcical comments in the explanations of his works. Peculiar studies have been published to educate the public, but they only lead astray. For instance, there is an extraordinary analysis of one of Palestrina’s masses, based only on a scrupulous enumeration of expression, dynamic, and tempo markings that a modern editor deemed it appropriate to add to the composer’s score in the same style of print used when it was first published.⁸

Prejudices of Modern Musicians

Many see the lack of musical understanding in the folly of such examples, but even some artists of great merit and some excellent composers have frequently shown their incompetence when writing critiques of works from an earlier period. Their remarks are sometimes as ridiculous as those of dilettantes wandering astray in art history, but their blunders are much more dangerous because their

⁵ Jean-Louis Lecerf de la Viéville, *Comparaison de la Musique italienne et de la Musique française* (Brussels: 1704), pt. 2, 276.

⁶ See also the poem by Séré de Rieux, *La Musique* (Lyon: 1714).

⁷ The first comparison is found in Johann Ludwig Tieck’s *Phantasmus* (Berlin: 1812–17), 3:2; the second occurs frequently in French criticism from the first part of the 19th century.

⁸ This astounding critique, which appeared ten years ago in a provincial journal, was written by a very well-educated man who was a music lover and certainly versed in studying the past but who ignored the technique and history of musical forms.

acknowledged expertise gives credence to their words in the public's eye, and the least of their opinions takes on an oracular power. A general opinion is fashioned upon their statements, which are very often based only on prejudice. In one of his writings, Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers, organist to Louis XIV, reminds us that he agrees with Quintilian's pronouncement: "Happy would be the arts, if only artists judged them!"⁹—a questionable maxim from a general point of view, and unacceptable if we apply it to the art of the past, which present-day artists generally evaluate with a supreme injustice, especially among themselves. We expect deep insights from them, but we soon see that they are often satisfied with going no further than the surface of a work and considering only the way it is constructed. They are too distracted by differences in craft, and they do not know how to recognize the merits of a technique other than their own, seeing only imperfection in the dissimilarities of this outmoded writing when compared to theirs. They condemn, in the name of the doctrine they have learned in school, all who do not follow it, and, with a pedantic arrogance, they point out what they call the inaccuracies of primitives. Or worse, they show a disdainful indulgence for what they consider the stammerings of an art being born. Even their admiration for certain illustrious composers is not exempt from insolence, and it often remains shallow. Focused only on the forms of the works whose surface perfection they extol, these accomplished craftsmen neglect to examine the interiors. Their curiosity is satisfied when they discover the mechanics of these sonorous equations, and they are content with praising the works and holding them up as examples of the ingenuity it took to put them together and the skillful patience it took to organize them. Also, these composers remain convinced that the early fugues—from which they have learned the mechanics of their art—are only studies, and they are all too ready to declare that the early arias are nothing but vocal exercises for singers. It seems to them then that a quest for abstraction or virtuosity was the only reason these older composers wrote—dedicated merely to a haughty dryness or an idle gymnastics.

But if we don't accept such viewpoints, we must look for something more in the works of yesteryear—something more alive, more universal and, we might also say, something more useful. Through the blending of sounds, the vocal stresses, and the play of instruments, the masters—the real masters—addressed themselves to everyone. They were bent on communicating the movements of their souls, unveiling the feelings in their hearts, and representing the visions of life engraved in their brains; so we must not fail to appreciate this hallowed part of their works that they meant for us to know. Let us look, then, into the thinking of these musical poets—whose archaic language can seem incomprehensible to us—so that we may cease to mistake their works for shadows clad in outdated costumes decorated with tattered embroidery so that we may know that they speak the language of the heart as energetically and as richly as the most modern masters whose eloquence moves

⁹ Nevers, *Dissertation sur le Chant grégorien* (Paris: 1683).

us so deeply. We must try to recognize these earlier composers' passion for telling the great secrets that created a tumult in their breasts. Then, at last, we will understand them.

Music, in fact, has never lacked expressive potential. The forms of the art have varied, but the feelings that inspire it have remained immutable. The same world of ideas and impressions—however it manifests itself outwardly—is always described in these forms. At all times, music has contained images of human feelings, and it has never stopped being the profound and faithful mirror of our souls, just as lakes and ponds have always contained reflections of the changing sky. Each epoch has had composers who have tried to interpret in sound what they have experienced—or what they would like us to feel—and it is up to us to discover and unravel in their works the feelings that have informed them, alongside and sometimes underlying their technical considerations. To do this, we must go directly to the source of the composer's inspiration.

*Double Aspect of the Works of Bach:
Master of Technique and Powerful Orator*

The quest is captivating. It can even seem rather fantastical to some of us—a pursuit of the ineffable. But, on the contrary, it is a very practical study, made worthwhile by the attention to detail and the patience that we bring to it. Yet, when it comes to exploring Bach's compositions, a peculiar difficulty can hold us back. At first the master can appear less accessible than every other composer, and we can readily imagine that there is no way to penetrate the depths of his works. Their imposing magnificence, which rejects the commonplace, can also hold us at the threshold of his art. They can dazzle us, and we can be overcome by a stupor of admiration at our initial hearing. We forget to probe into the master's intention, and he can overwhelm our understanding with his prestige and disconcert us with his boldness. Sometimes even the mark of time disappears from his commanding music, which seems to exist only unto itself and to have been conceived for all eternity. The unleashing of his rhythms and the impetuous freedom of his motifs beckon us to follow them on their elaborate flight. They keep us in a state of intense contemplation as this game of spinning sounds obsesses us. Gradually, a kind of vertigo overtakes us, such as we might feel while looking from the floor of a dark cathedral at the entangled swirls of light shining through a high rose window traversed by the sun.

So we tend not to ask ourselves then if some message is inscribed in the midst of this magnificent intertwining. In the radiance that entrances us, we often recognize only the manifestation of a rare power, wielded by a superhuman will, and we only experience its grandeur. But we must tear ourselves away from thinking that Bach only speaks to us from resplendent palaces. He calls to us, rather, from the inner sanctuaries of temples erected with his own hands, and his

utterances are never empty. He always has some message to deliver, and, like an ancient orator, he has no other intention than to convince us and move us. If his eloquence is sometimes mixed with marvels and delights, it is because he wants to conquer us first through our admiration—or charm us—so that he can keep us more securely focused on the meaning of his message. All his art is essentially a kind of magnificent language that he has filled with action. Yet, because this language is formed from such striking words and such beautiful phrases, some people consider it futile, if not disrespectful, to ask what meaning can be found in them. Nevertheless, we must inquire. But no matter how precise our technical analyses may be, they will never take into account the whole Bach. They may acquaint us with the methods of his craft, but not its purpose. It is not enough to admire the arabesques embroidered on the precious veils that he weaves, nor is it enough just to make out their design or point out the laws by which he groups them. We must also discover the principles by which he creates them. We must treat the elements of his music as the symbols of an unknown language and go out of our way to decipher them so that we may rise to his level of thinking. Only this approach will allow us to know if he has expressive tendencies and if he remains faithful to a system of actualizing them.

Necessity of First Delving Deeply into His Compositions Rendered with Words

Therefore, we will look for the meaning of his motifs, his rhythms, his harmonies, his orchestrations, and even the forms he uses. But it would be very difficult to discover this meaning by confining ourselves solely to the realm of his purely instrumental music; so we will try to explain Bach by starting with a meticulous study of the works he bases on literary texts, and we will guide ourselves, if we can, to an understanding of his thinking by observing exactly where his inspiration is subject to the ideas and feelings expressed by the words he adorns with music.

Method and Plan of this Study

To accomplish this, we will examine the correspondences he forms and the connections he maintains between the words provided for him by his librettists and the musical interpretations he makes of them. We will see if, in comparable circumstances, he uses motifs that resemble and agree with each other in nature—motifs which actually come from a similar source. Gradually, this work will lead us to form a sort of dictionary of Bach's language, and to understand it so that we will be able to identify those parts of his work he has given over to emotion and to description. This will reveal to us an unchanging parallel between the words of the

text and the musical figures he adapts to them. In all his works, we will continually find him portraying the same ideas by using the same set of expressions and the same concordances. The power, the clarity, and the constancy of his intentions will then become apparent to us, and the result of this multitude of comparisons and connections will attest to the conscious character of his art, and, at the same time, will teach us its unquestionable meaning.

Then we must extend this approach to interpreting the rest of Bach's works. The expressive motifs he has created for compositions illumined by words will provide us with a well-defined understanding that will also reveal the explicit meaning of the purely instrumental works in which we encounter these same motifs again. In fact, there will be no doubt that these motifs, which have been precisely combined so many times with words, still correspond to the ideas with which they are commonly linked, even when the human voice is not singing them.

Bach and His Predecessors

Our method of interpretation will consist, then, of making multiple comparisons between different parts of Bach's works. Studying compositions by his forerunners and contemporaries will also help to maintain the accuracy of our critical analysis, and we will recognize that, if Bach speaks the musical language of his time, it is clear that he learned it from its sources by assiduously studying the works of those who developed it. We will see that his breadth, richness, and independence come from the sophistication that he acquired by making himself the disciple of all the great musicians who came before him. But because he did not submit himself to close supervision and was left free from the constraints usually imposed upon students by their restricted and timid teachers, he also has fewer hindrances to his inventiveness. He welcomes, repeats, or renews to his liking, in his own vocabulary, each source of expression that appears effective to him. Furthermore, we will show that he never diverts these borrowed motifs from the general acceptance attributed to them, and if he differs from the composers from whom he takes the motifs, it is not in terms of their meaning, but in terms of the vigor with which he realizes them. It will be clear that he seeks much less to make innovations in this common musical language than to speak it with more energy and that he is never concerned with being unusual, but only with the stubborn purpose of being powerfully expressive.

Bach According to Bach

Paralleling his passion to discover all the resources of his art is Bach's other essential trait—his obstinate resolution to make it, in some way, a tool for captivating our imagination. He is vigorously expansive and wants to hold our

attention so that we will understand and follow him. But he must first guide us and show us where he wants to lead us. So he marks the way, relentlessly, with the fierce insistence of his motifs, the irresistible rigor of his rhythms, and the meaningful intensity of his harmonies. In this unfurling of power he creates an auditory triumph, and he infuses it with so much energy that he seems to feel himself entrusted with a lofty mission. He offers himself as cantor of the Holy Scriptures, and, in composing music for sacred texts, he dedicates himself to proclaiming them explicitly, afraid only that a single word might be lost from them. Profoundly attached to his evangelic Lutheran religion, he feels it indispensable for the edification of the faithful that the holy text must act upon them in all its abundance and go straight to their hearts. He exults in the thought of transmitting this sacred substance to them, and the source of his lyricism lies in the same joy that intoxicated the first disciples of the Reformation when it became permissible for them to address their individual outpourings directly to God, to receive His messages, and to repeat them in their own mother tongue. Like these men, Bach merely uses the musical vernacular of his day to create the vivid statements he makes for everyone to hear, and he never fears repeating them. As if boldly mirroring the ardent exhortations of a popular preacher, he joins each utterance with a noble gesture that inspires it and explains it for everyone's contemplation.

There is nothing obscure about Bach's musical discourse. He knows that he is communicating with a public used to metaphors and common allusions in music. But sometimes it is true that we have to make an effort to translate them, and many who have written on Bach in our day have not even guessed what these metaphors and allusions are, since they have fallen almost entirely into disuse. However, Bach's contemporaries found them clear—these figures of musical style that spoke directly to their imaginations, barely engaging their intellects more than if they were playing a game. Prepared by long practice, his audience instinctively interpreted the congruity of these sonorous images and the words with which they were combined. And in his purely instrumental music, listeners again recognized and interpreted the same motifs, rhythms, and harmonies, since it seemed natural to associate these features with the concepts already so fully defined in his vocal music. These musical formulas therefore retained quite a precise meaning, sanctioned by use and often justified even more by their sound. Ultimately, people came to perceive in these figures, so familiar to musicians of the time, something more precious than the mere illustration of words and discovered in them actual equivalents to the words themselves—living representations of ideas, no doubt somewhat vague, but nevertheless seeming to emanate from a great, evocative, and stirring power.

Moreover, the psyche of Bach's public was shaped by this manner of listening to music as a language, since the considerations of music's psychological effects made up a part of every traditional culture. Famous examples of its power lived in the minds of everyone with a little education, and the proper way to render its

persuasive virtue—which the ancients had so often extolled—was written about widely. Theologians felt that this art, which celebrated the Lord so magnificently, should be employed to govern the human passions and to give birth to contemplation in people's souls.

This shaping of listeners' minds corresponded to the training of young composers, and we will see that an important part was played by instructions for expression that were given in the composition treatises of the 17th and 18th centuries. We can find many points in them that Bach put to good use and many doctrines that he practiced. He had, in fact, the greatest curiosity about instructional treatises, and we will point out several that he studied and whose influence can be traced in his compositions.

How to Arrive at Establishing His Aesthetic

When we have seen at which points Bach's inspiration is governed by his constant desire to express or describe—a desire manifested in the meaning of the basic components of his music, in his choice of motifs and his way of combining them, and in his harmonies, rhythms, and instrumentation—we will also analyze the forms of development that he employs. And we will need to identify the origins of these forms in what he received from his precursors so that we may discern what he chose instead and what he added to them. We will study the architect and the poet in him, so that we can understand which of the two prevails, and, by doing so, we will find out if he is concerned more with beautiful structures than with feeling, or if he actually builds these structures in order to better translate specific emotions.

After seeing how Bach, the disciple, studies and imitates his forerunners and several of his contemporaries, we will look at the precepts of his teaching as they were handed down to us by his pupils.

Lastly, we will examine the judgments made about Bach during his own lifetime and during the following period when he was still well remembered.

From this mass of elements, we will do our utmost to determine the course of Bach's mind and will, as well as the concepts behind his inventiveness and his style. Thus, through this approach, we will try to identify the principles of his work in order to reveal, in a word, its aesthetic.

CHAPTER ONE

DIRECTION OF MOTIFS

17th-century music considered as a direct commentary on the words. – Advice for facilitating the understanding of a sung text. – Certain words particularly designated for use by composers. – Musical images of rising and descending. – Frequency of these images in Bach's predecessors. – Bach uses these images in a literal and figurative sense to serve in expressing ideas of moral elevation and debasement. – Bach generalizes their meaning. – The idea of reciprocity. – Motifs of envelopment, themes of contortion. – Return and obligation.

17th-century Music Considered as a Direct Commentary on the Words

In Bach's vocal music, the meaning of the words inspires his creation of the melodic motifs he joins to them. He carefully forms these motifs according to the words of the text, trying hard to interpret, with the help of musical images, something of the ideas he finds there. We can easily see that he strives everywhere to evoke these ideas and that he attempts to represent them as clearly and as completely as possible. In doing so, he also upholds the 17th-century custom of following the example of the Italians in the use of the lyrical recitative.¹

¹ To study the first attempts at music in the recitative style, see August Wilhelm Ambros's *Geschichte de Musik* (1862–82), vol. 4, chap. 3 and following chaps., and Romain Rolland's *l'Histoire de l'Opéra en Europe* (Paris: 1895).

Advice for Facilitating the Understanding of a Sung Text

The practice of this style was developed rather early in Germany. In 1619, Heinrich Schütz inaugurated it by composing some psalms for several choirs in what he specifies as “a recitative style,” nearly unknown until then in his country. In the preface to this collection, he insists on the importance of the words, the meaningful substance of the singing. He wants them to act powerfully on the mind of the listener and for nothing to be lost from them through an indecisive mumbling of a tangled or rushed performance. Therefore, he recommends singing these psalms in a moderate tempo so that the words can be enunciated by the singers distinctly and understandably. “Otherwise,” he says, “this music will only produce a very disagreeable harmony—no more than a battle of flies—contrary to the intention of the composer.”²

The same year (1619), Michael Praetorius includes, in the third volume of his *Syntagma musicum*, a translation of part of the preface to the *Canciones* by L. Viadana, who declares that he has tried to make each word and its syllables correspond with the notes so that listeners can more easily perceive the words and understand the phrases.³ In the same volume, when Praetorius gives his own opinion of the advantage offered by the indications of nuances and tempos used by the Italians, he affirms that these gradations of intensity or speed have a great effect on the ears and the souls of those who hear them—that the text itself and the sense of the words demand that the tempo sometimes be hurried, sometimes slowed down and that the singing of the chorus sometimes be calm and soft, sometimes vigorous and swift.⁴

In the introduction to *Philothea, is est anima Deo chara* (1669), a religious piece by Johannes Paullin performed in Munich in 1643 and 1658, the composer likewise advises singing it slowly at certain times, and forcefully at others, to conform with the passion expressed by the text.⁵

Other composers of this period also emphasize the importance of clearly articulating words when they are sung. For example, Caspar Horn, in the introduction to his *Geistliche Harmonien*, says that if violins or viols accompany the voice with chords, they must be played slowly and with a certain softness so that the singer is much better heard and understood.⁶

² Schütz, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Spitta (Leipzig: 1886), 2:6.

³ Praetorius, *Syntagmatis musici Michaelis Praetorii tomus tertius* (1614), pt. 1, 2:4 (definition of words *Cantio*, *concentus*, *symphonia*).

⁴ The same work (Tome III, pt. 3, 1:112) explains the words *forte*, *piano*, *praesto*, *adagio*, *lento*, and Praetorius points out that some performers never allow for nuances, especially in the church.

⁵ Some portions of this curious work were sung at a concert given at the Schola Cantorum, February 2, 1906.

⁶ Horn, *Geistliche Harmonien, über die gewöhnlichen Evangelia so durchs gantze Jahr, auch hohen und andern Festen, pflegen erkläret zu werden, zu Erweckung gottseliger*

Certain Words Particularly Designated for Use by Composers

These viewpoints show how much composers of the time valued a penetrating and animated diction that makes the language stand out in the midst of the music. To better assure the primacy of the text, they did more than insist that the performers honor it; they even subjected their own composing to it. To give support to the meaning of the words, they accustomed themselves to always translating them into music through the same processes in order to associate them with a permanent vocabulary of easily recognizable melodic and rhythmic forms. The infinite number of correspondences that these composers found between the qualities of sound and the qualities of things allowed them to build and enrich such a vocabulary, and equivalences between word and melody were established and explained by the accepted connections between the characteristics that can apply just as well to one as to the other. We can only conceive of the formation and use of such a dictionary if we allow for the possibility of a constant transposition between the properties of sounds and the properties of subjects that we would like to depict in sounds—a continual arrangement of images and metaphors, a perpetual alternating of allusions. The purely musical elements in this organized fiction, characterized by expressions used in ordinary speech, come to stand for the general idea contained in a given expression. The sonorous figures—the motifs—identified with a certain, commonly recognized way of being, come to represent that way of being itself through a system of interpretation that constantly passes from the abstract to the concrete, from the specific to the general. Here, everything is based on a primitive allegorical schema that allows us to find—through certain likenesses, or through a more or less smooth train of thoughts—some words with which we can evaluate the music, define its elements and resources, and describe its effects.

Actually, this musical language that blossomed in the 17th century took a long time to evolve. The 16th-century masters of polyphony very often resort to musical symbols to represent the words in a piece,⁷ even though the theoreticians of that time give only very general indications about the agreement of the music and the text. However, for quite some time, the master composers themselves produced many testimonies of their concern with translating words into music. In 1592, Sethus Calvisius is content to state some principal rules, thinking that it would be an endless task to teach everything that must be observed through these

Andacht, etc. (Dresden: 1680). See also the opinions given by Nicholas Niedt preceding his *Musicalische Sonn- und Fest-Tags-Lust* (Sondershausen: 1698): “The slower the tempo, the better the text will be understood.”

⁷ Vincent Galilei condemns the “abuses of the contrapuntalists in what is considered *the imitation of words*” in *Dialogo della Musica et della Musica Moderna* (1581), 89.

precepts to express the power of speech.⁸ But in 1613, Pedro Cerone adds some musical examples to his written opinions, which he draws from Palestrina and other masters who wrote for several voices in a contrapuntal, rather than a recitative, style.⁹ On the other hand, Johann Crüger scarcely mentions Calvisius's advice in the summary at the end of his *Synopsis musica*¹⁰ published in 1624. This might surprise us, since Crüger does cite Claudio Monteverdi, Heinrich Schütz, and other masters of the new school. Only later do we encounter a German treatise whose author speaks in detail about accommodating melody to words. This book, published in 1631 at Ingolstadt under the title of *Architectonice Musices universalis*, was written by the Jesuit Wolfgang Schönsleder under the pseudonym of Volupius Decorus.¹¹ Schönsleder doesn't make a distinction between the interpretive language of the masters of counterpoint and that of the masters of recitative, but we see that, in the eyes of their contemporaries, the latter were, so to speak, only continuing from the work of the former, and that, even if the new recitative form that they cultivated was more suitable to expression or description than polyphony's intertwining forms, we can still recognize in those complex works of the past the customary intentions of conveying ideas or feelings. In proposing to teach composers to excite feelings or imitate actions in what he says makes for "the true and indisputable delightfulness of music," Schönsleder chooses numerous examples from works for multiple voices, and he frequently cites passages drawn from Orlando di Lasso, whom he considers as having excelled in the art of awakening the passions.¹² It is true that the suggestions he gives are not very developed, but they are quite precise and are illuminated by abundant musical citations. In several passages from his chapter "de Textu," he summarizes the customary procedures of this descriptive language. After advising composers to consider carefully the nature and the characteristics of the text they want to set to music, he presents a series of words that they should try to represent. First he lists words that refer to states of the soul: joy, affliction, fear, anger, compassion, etc. He passes on to words expressing movement and the placement of objects and then comes to adverbs of time and number. Lastly, he includes the various qualities of human life at different ages. All these things can be depicted, he says, "through the

⁸ Calvisius, *Melopoeia, sive Melodiae condendae ratio, quam vulgo Musicam poeticam vocant, ex veris fundamentis extructa et explicate, a Setho Calvico, Ludi illustris qui est Poetae ad Salam, musica* (1592), chap. 18, of *Oratione sive Textu*.

⁹ Cerone, *El Melopeo y maestro, tractado de musica theorica y practica* (Naples: 1613), 665.

¹⁰ Crüger, *Synopsis musica* (1630), 16:181.

¹¹ Schönsleder (Volupius Decorus), *Architectonice Musices universalis ex que Melopoeam per universa et solida Fundamenta Musicorum, proprio Marte condiscere possi* (Ingolstadt: Wilhelm Eder, 1631).

¹² Schönsleder, *Architectonice Musices universalis*, 193. *Excellit hic auctor in affectibus exprimendis: nisi quod modulis utitur tardioribus et lentis; non pro hoc seculo quod amat currentia.*

sound itself or through the variety of notes.” He wisely rejects a symbolism of conventions where our auditory sense would play very little part: “The words such as day, light, night, and darkness can be represented by black notes and white notes; but that does not address the ear, which we are seeking to please, and it is only a matter for the eyes, which must not concern us here.”¹³

After Schönsleder, the method and tone of treatises on expressive composition remain the same. In these works, the instructions appear to be just as detailed and equally precise. But by then the pictorial style seems so familiar to everyone that the authors refrain from giving examples, and they find it enough merely to refer to the words that it is a tradition to illustrate. Everyone knows the musical figures themselves. Moreover, the importance of meticulously translating the words into sound is always acknowledged. Near the end of the 17th century, we find Wolfgang Caspar Printz writing “When a musician wants to compose something based on a text, he must not only understand all the thought in it but, in particular, grasp the meaning and power of each word.” He adds further on “The composer must unite the words with the notes so skillfully that the notes appear to express precisely what the words mean.”¹⁴ In 1697, Daniel Speer exhorts his readers to take careful note of the meaning of the words, for in it, he says, lies the source of the various emotions of the soul. Then he provides a long list of words that one should not let pass without matching them with very appropriate musical formulas.¹⁵ He doesn’t group them into categories like Schönsleder, but he proposes many of the same ones for inspiring the composer when he assembles his inventory of what Lecerf de la Viéville calls “certain words distinguished in all languages by the common regard composers have for them.”¹⁶

We won’t attempt a critique of these prescriptions and recipes here because, for the moment, we only need to study how Bach bears them in mind and puts them into practice like his forerunners and contemporaries did.

¹³ Schönsleder, *Architectonice Musices universalis*, pt. 2, 8:177.

¹⁴ Printz, *Phrynidis Mytilenaei oder der Satyrischen Componisten erster Theil . . .* (Leipzig: 1696), 114.

¹⁵ Speer, *Grundrichtiger Unterricht der Musicalischen Kunst, oder vierfaches Musicalisches Kleeblatt*, etc. (Ulm: 1697). He writes on page 283 “The following words must also agree with the music: sky, earth, high, low, bad, good, well, evil, go, stand still, long time, rapidly, quick, to sigh, to run, to chase, burning, quiet, one, two, three, all together . . . ‘Kyrie Eleison, Alleluia, Amen,’ always, eternally, to rest, jump, raise up, lower, climb, fall, sunrise, sunset, superb, humble, kind, rough, black, white, harsh, soft, abyss, mountain, soon, new, often, rarely, Almighty God, angel, man, childhood, woman, servant, contempt, to force, free, linked, little, nothing, enough, heavy, hard, broken, hope, I speak, to follow, to return. One must observe such words well,” etc.

¹⁶ Schönsleder, *Architectonice Musices universalis*, Pt 2, 8:177.

Musical Images of Rising and Descending

Let us first look over the interpretation of some words whose translation into music is as simple to imagine as it is to recognize—words which bring to mind ideas of rising or descending. Sixteenth- and 17th-century composers generally accompany these words with motifs that climb or with motifs whose notes go lower and lower. The lines of sound they form are reflected clearly in the visible lines of the notes laid out on paper to represent them. Examples of faithfulness to this convention are innumerable, and modern editions of early works provide us with so many that we need not look any further. Therefore, we find that the Latin word “ascendit” (climb up, ascend)¹⁷ corresponds to a series of rising notes in the “Credos” of each of four 16th-century masses selected at random from the second volume of C. Proske’s collection. In this same body of works, “descendit” (go down, descend) is translated three times out of four by a descending sequence of notes.¹⁸ Likewise, in each of the six “Credos” in the first year of the book of masses in Charles Bordes’ *Anthologie*, the word “descendit” is sung on a descending motif, and in four of them “ascendit” is joined to a rising melodic pattern. The custom of making use of these fundamental resources of musical picturesqueness is so general toward the end of the 16th century that Vincenzo Galilei ridiculed as a vulgar abuse the mania of composers who make singers growl the words “he went down into Pluto’s realm” and oblige them to squeak in a high voice “He raised himself up to the stars.”¹⁹ But Galilei mocked in vain, and the founders of dramatic Italian music who brought about the reform he preaches in his writings never rejected their heritage from the past, for Claudio Monteverdi, in *Orfeo* (1608), depicts the depths of the abyss through low notes.²⁰

Frequency of these Images in Bach’s Predecessors

German music of the time preserves the same procedures. Heinrich Schütz, in his *Die Auferstehung Christi Historia* (The story of Christ’s resurrection) (1623),²¹ does not fail to portray the word “auferstehen” (come back to life) by an ascending melodic movement, and he imagines the idea contained in “ich fahre auf zu meinen Vater” (I raise myself toward my Father) in the same way. To portray “Let God

¹⁷ [Pirro left some foreign words and passages in their original languages (e.g., Latin, Italian, German, etc.), but their translations are provided, as in this case, when their meanings are particularly relevant to his argument.—Trans.]

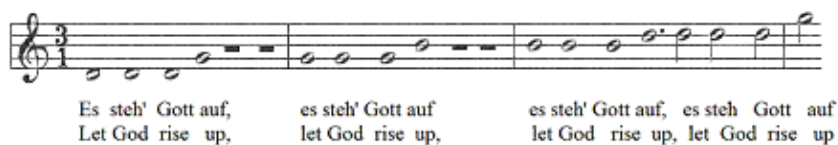
¹⁸ Carl Proske, *Selectus novus Missarum praestantissimorum superioris Aevi Auctorum* (Regensburg: 1861).

¹⁹ Galilei, *Dialoga di Vencentio Galilei nobile Fiorentino, della Musica Antica et della Moderna* (1581), 80.

²⁰ Monteverdi, *Orfeo*, act 2.

²¹ Schütz, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 1.

arise!” he borrows a theme from his *Symphoniae sacrae* that gradually rises (ex. 1.1).²²



Ex. 1.1. Heinrich Schütz, *Symphoniae sacrae*: “*Es Steh Gott auf*,”
SWV 356, mm. 7–10.²³

Further on, he depicts the rising and setting of the sun with a climbing and a descending motif.²⁴

In the same collection, Schütz uses the tones of a solemn, ascending arpeggio to accompany the words “The Lord is elevated above all the Gentiles.”²⁵

Elsewhere, the phrase “I bend my knees” inspires Schütz to compose a descending motif (ex. 1.2).²⁶



Ex. 1.2. Heinrich Schütz, *Sämmtliche Werke: Kleine Geistliche Concerte*,
SWV 319, mm. 1–4.

In the works of Johann Rudolph Ahle (1625–1673), we find descriptive meanings of the same kind rendered by the same means,²⁷ and Sebastian Anton Scherer offers us similar interpretations in his masses.²⁸

²² Schütz, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 7 (*Die Symphoniae sacrae. Zweiter Theil*), 87. A similar interpretation of the same words is given by Albert Schop in *Exercitia vocis* (1667), no. 4.

²³ [All English translations of German, Italian, Latin, Greek, and French texts are my own or from collaborations with Barbara Fischer, Charles Cortelli, Jeffrey and Holly Mitchell, Chariclia Gounaris, Vivien Mackie, or Alexander Murray, with the exception of those translations of the German from the many texts of Bach’s sacred cantatas. They are taken from Melvin P. Unger’s *Handbook to Bach’s Sacred Cantata Texts* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996).—Trans.]

²⁴ Schütz, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 7: 134.

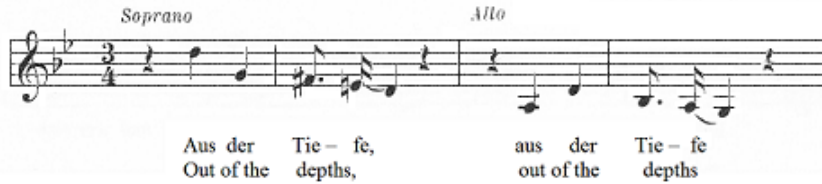
²⁵ Schütz, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 7: 136.

²⁶ Schütz, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 6 (*Kleine Geistliche Concerte*), pt. 2, no. 14.

²⁷ *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, series 1, vol. 5, (1901). See, for example, the melody on page 65 joined to the words “the day inclined.”

²⁸ Scherer, *Missae, Psalmi et Motteti* (Ulm: B. Kuhne, 1657).

Bach remains constantly faithful to these fundamental interpretations.²⁹ In his cantata *Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir* (Out of the depths I cry to Thee, Lord),³⁰ which dates from the year 1707, he uses these characteristic motifs in the first chorus, which is based on the first verse of Psalm 130 (“de profundis”) (out of the depths) set in German (ex. 1.3):



Ex. 1.3. *Aus der Tiefen*, BWV 131/1, mm. 24–27.

Several bars later, the bass voices span a whole octave to reach down to low D,³¹ then low C—notes whose use is extremely rare.

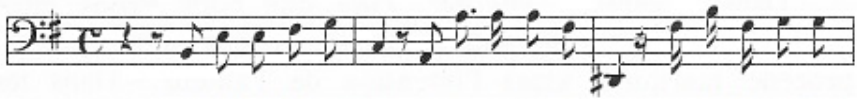
In the cantata *Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn* (Walk on the path of faith) written around 1715³² (ex. 1.4), the words “The Lord was placed in Israel for the fall and the resurrection” are mirrored in a musical phrase in which a very low note suddenly occurs on the word “fall,” and then the motif rises up on the word “resurrection.”

²⁹ Johann Mattheson (1681–1764), confirms the use of these motifs when the ideas of ascension or lowering prevail in the text. *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg: 1739), pt. 2, chap. 11.

³⁰ [German titles of Bach’s works are translated only where those titles first appear in the text. At times, German spellings are modernized. If works have commonly used English titles, such as *St. Matthew Passion*, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and *Christmas Oratorio*, those titles appear throughout.—Trans.]

³¹ See, in the *Florilegium Portense* by Bodenschatz (1618) a passage from the motet *Audi tellus* by Jacobus Gallus where the low D is given to the bass on the last syllable of the words *ut lapides* (in stone). In the motet *O profunditatem divitiarum* by J. Th. Tribiol (*Promptuarium musicum* by Schadaeus, pt. 3, 1613), we also find the low D in the bass on the last syllable of *profunditatem* (the depths, the abyss). See other examples of the same nature in Weckmann, Zachow, and Joh. Ph. Krieger (*Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, series 1, 6:37, 11:57; series 2, 1:136).

³² [The first performance of this cantata was 30 December 1714 according to Malcolm Boyd, *Bach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 263.—Trans.]

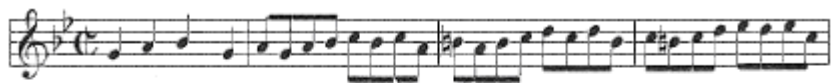


Der Heiland ist gesetzt in Is-ra-el zum Fall und Auf-er-stehen
The Savior has been placed in Israel for falling and rising again

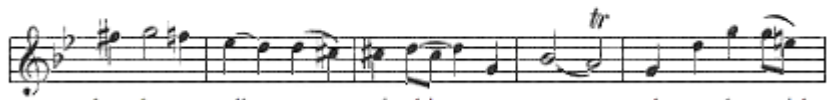
Ex. 1.4. *Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn*, BWV 152/3, mm. 1–3.

*Bach Uses these Images in a Literal and Figurative Sense
to Serve in Expressing Ideas of Moral Elevation and Debasement*

In a similar way, Bach expresses the ideas of elevation and humiliation in the cantata *Wer sich selbst erhöhet, der soll erniedrigt werden* (Whoever exalts himself, he shall be humbled). Here is the beginning of the tenor part of the first chorus from this cantata, composed, according to Ph. Spitta, around the year 1720 (ex. 1.5).³³



Wer sich selbst erhö - - - - -
Whoever himself exalts - - - - -



het, der soll er - nie - dri - get wer - den, und wer sich
- , he shall be humbled - - - - , and whoever



selbst er - nie - - - - - dri - get, der soll er
himself humbles - - - - - , he shall be

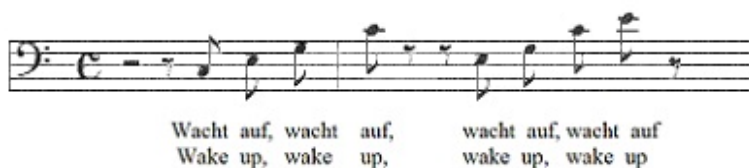


hö - - - - - het wer - - - - den.
exalted - - - - -

Ex. 1.5. *Wer sich selbst erhöhet, der soll erniedrigt werden*, BWV 47/1, mm. 39–56.

³³ Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach* (Leipzig: 1873), 1:624, 821.

Donnerwort! I (O eternity, thou thund'rous word!) on the words “Wake up, wake up, lost sheep” (ex. 1.7).



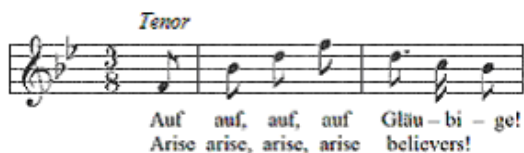
Ex. 1.7. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! I*, BWV 20/8, mm. 7–8.

He does the same in the cantata *Unser Mund sei voll Lachens* (May our mouths be full of laughter) (ex. 1.8).



Ex. 1.8. *Unser Mund sei voll Lachens*, BWV 110/6, mm. 13–16.

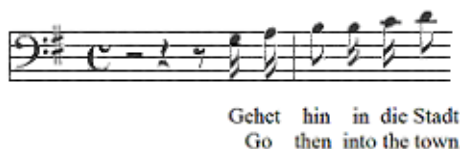
And we meet a kindred motif in the cantata *Ein Herz, das seinen Jesum lebend weiss* (A heart that knows Jesus to be alive), in which it is joined to these words, “Arise, arise believers!” (“Auf, auf Gläubige!”) (ex. 1.9).



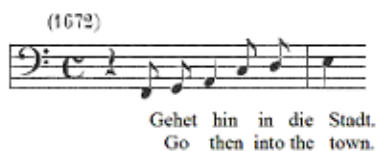
Ex. 1.9. *Ein Herz, das seinen Jesum lebend weiss*, BWV 134/2, mm. 24–26.

It is interesting to compare the beginning of this aria by Bach to the beginning of the alto aria from Johann Wolfgang Frank’s opera *Æneas’ Ankunfft in Italien* (Aeneas’s arrival in Italy) (Hamburg: 1680) (ex. 1.10).³⁷

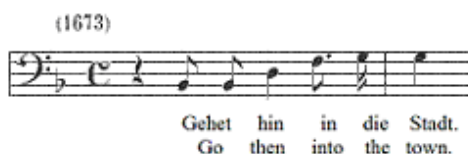
³⁷ Franck, *Arien aus dem musicalischen Sing-Spiel Aeneas’ Ankunfft in Italien, mit beygefügeten Ritornellen* (Hamburg: 1680). Only the violin parts of the ritornellos are included with the copy preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale.



Ex. 1.13a. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/I/15, mm. 15–16.



Ex. 1.13b. Johann Sebastiani, *St. Matthew Passion*
(*Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, 1904, series 1, 1:19), mm. 64–65.



Ex. 1.13c. Johann Theile, *Saint Matthew Passion*, I/6, mm. 2–3.

The words “auferwecken” (wake up), “aufthun” (open), and “aufstehen”³⁹ (get up) equally suggest upwardly directed themes to Bach.

If we move on from his descriptions of objects and actions to his representations of feelings, we also find that Bach joins ascending motifs to words that refer to a rectifying of the soul: pride, courage, vigor. So, in the tenor recitative from the cantata *Meine Seele erhebt den Herren* (My soul exalts the Lord),⁴⁰ on the words that evoke the vain presumptions of the proud, he creates a rising arpeggio that goes up to a high A on the word “Stolz” (pride). In the cantata *Wer sich selbst erhöhet*, which we have already mentioned, examples of the same kind abound. It is hardly necessary to mention that the theme of this cantata’s first chorus—which illustrates the word “erhöhen” (raise), and whose figurative meaning can be translated into sound in the same way as its literal meaning—relies on the same kind of musical image that Bach usually joins to the general idea of elevation. And over the course of the cantata, we also find clear evidence of him portraying words that represent only a state of the soul instead of any external happenings.

³⁹ See the alto recitative from the cantata *Komm, du süsse Todesstunde* (BWV 161/ m. 18), the *Christmas Oratorio* (BWV 248/58, m. 7), the cantata *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten* (BWV 93/2, m. 12), and the *St. Matthew Passion* (BWV 244/33, m. 13; 63, m. 7).

⁴⁰ As in the bass aria on the word “Hochmuth” (pride).

He applies just as much care to forming descending motifs when the sense of the words evokes ideas of slope, fall, or depth.

On the words “I sink to the ground” in the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* (I had much grief in my heart),⁴¹ he creates a motif that expresses a gradual descent leading to the bottom of the abyss (ex. 1.14).



Ex. 1.14. *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/5, mm. 33–34.

Bach writes extremely low notes for the tenor here to strengthen this image, and we noted earlier (after ex. 1.3) that he asks very low notes of the bass in the cantata *Aus der Tiefen*. One of the masters he admired most, Dietrich Buxtehude (1637–1707), organist at the Church of Holy Mary in Lübeck, used the same approach in his motet *Gott, Gott hilf mir* (God, God help me) on words similar to those in the example by Bach above (ex. 1.15).⁴²



Ex. 1.15. Dietrich Buxtehude, *Gott, Gott hilf mir*, BuxWV 34/2, mm. 32–34.

In the cantata *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her* (Now salvation is come hither to us), Bach gives us a description very much like those we have just been examining (ex. 1.16).

⁴¹ See also the recitative for soprano in the cantata *Mein Gott, we lang, ach lange?* (BWV 155).

⁴² *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst* (1903), series 1, 14:60. This volume, which contains a selection of works by Buxtehude (*Abendmusiken und Kirchenkantaten*), was edited by Dr. Max Seiffert. We should remember that Bach made the trip on foot from Arnstadt to Lübeck to acquaint himself with the art of Buxtehude, whose fame as organist had attracted him. Bach stayed around three months at Lübeck, where he arrived at the beginning of winter in 1705. (Spitta, *J.S. Bach*, 1:251 et seq.)—Cf. the same motet in Briegel’s *Mus. Lebens-Brunn*.

Tenor

Wir wa -- ren schon zu tief ge -- sun -- ken, der
We were already too deeply sunk, the

Ab -- grund schluckt' uns völ -- lig ein
Abyss swallows us completely in

Ex. 1.16. *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her*, BWV 9/3, mm. 12–16.

He scrupulously interprets the words “Gruft” (tomb, crypt),⁴³ “Grab” (grave)⁴⁴ when they are presented to him.

In a chorus from the *St. Matthew Passion*, the four parts sing, one after the other, a descending motif on the words “Descend from the cross.”⁴⁵

And he portrays the word “fallen” (to fall) with a downwardly directed melodic line, such as we find in the cantata *Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn* (ex. 1.17).

ja, ü -- ber ihn zur Höl -- -- len fällt
yes, over it into hell does-fall
(yes, falls over it [this noble stone] into hell)

Ex. 1.17. *Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn*, BWV 152/3, mm. 6–8.

He crafts the beginning of the first recitative from the cantata *Gleich wie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt* (Just as the rain and snow falls from heaven) on the same principle (ex. 1.18).

Gleich wie der Re -- gen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt
Just as the rain and snow from heaven falls

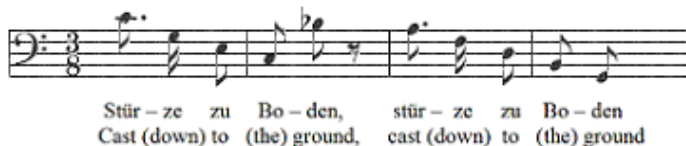
Ex. 1.18. *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt*, BWV 18/2, mm. 1–2.

⁴³ Cantata *Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende?* (BWV 27/3, m. 38).

⁴⁴ Cantatas *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen* (BWV 66/4, mm. 55–57) and *Jesu, der du meine Seele* (BWV 78/5, mm. 2–3); and the *St. John Passion* (BWV 245/38, m. 20) and *St. Matthew Passion* (BWV 244/76, m. 11).

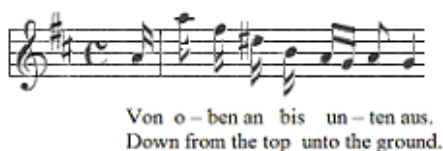
⁴⁵ BWV 244/67, mm. 35–40.

Then he faithfully depicts the violent movement from high to low in the aria “Plunge the pompous proud to the ground!” from the cantata *Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort* (Preserve us, Lord, by thy Word) (ex. 1.19).

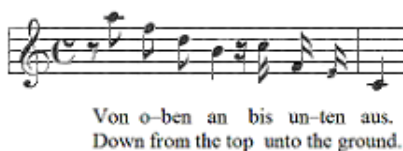


Ex. 1.19. *Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort*, BWV 126/4, mm. 9–12.

And he forcefully translates the words from the Gospel according to St. Matthew “And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two pieces *from top to bottom*,” which he uses not only in the *St. Matthew Passion* but again in the *St. John Passion* (exs. 1.20a, b).



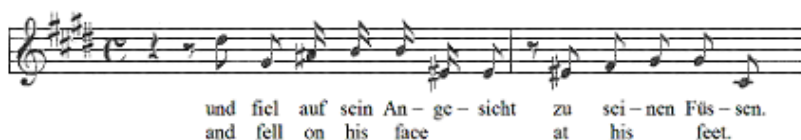
Ex. 1.20a. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/II/39, mm. 2–3.



Ex. 1.20b. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/II/73, mm. 3–4.

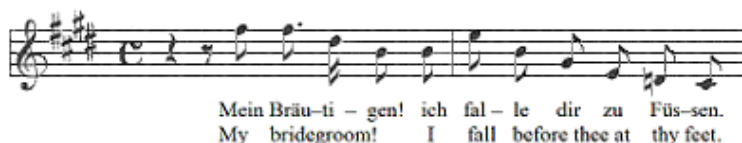
Just as Bach does not make a distinction between their literal and their figurative meaning when interpreting ideas of ascension, nor does he with the ideas of descending, inclining, or of falling—whether the meaning of the phrase he is setting to music is actual or imagined. We find a whole series of passages where he accompanies the words “to prostrate” and “to worship” with a descending motif, as if it has no purpose except to depict the bodily action, leaving to the singer the task of depicting the emotional meaning of the sensation. We see this in the cantata *Wer Dank opfert, der preiset mich* (He who offers thanksgiving, he praises me) when Bach portrays the healed leper prostrating himself—face to the earth, before Christ—without the motifs indicating anything other than the act itself, and without them appearing to evoke anything more than the appearance of kneeling. Looking

at the melodic line alone, it would seem that Bach intends only to describe the visible gesture (ex. 1.21).

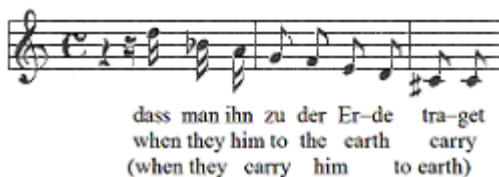


Ex. 1.21. *Wer Dank opfert, der preiset mich*, BWV 17/4, mm. 5–6.

From the point of view of shape, this vocal line differs very little from the one Bach creates at the beginning of the cantata *Gleichwie de Regen und Schnee*, whose first phrase we cited earlier (ex. 1.18). But in order to anticipate and prevent any potential confusion, we should also note at this point that we do not find all of Bach's expressive—or even descriptive—efforts solely in his melodic lines, and that he uses yet other means, which we will study later, to create the character and nuances of the tableaux he paints for us. Quite often the simple description is enough without his attempting to portray any deeper feeling, and, in certain cases—for example, in some recitatives—the frugality of expression is essential. So we are not astonished to find that Bach crafts melodies with nearly the same features for each of the following texts: “My bridegroom, I fall before thee at thy feet!” (ex. 1.22a);⁴⁶ “And when that last hour strikes, when they carry him to the earth” (ex. 1.22b); “And the vice of avarice hurls him before his time into the grave” (ex. 1.22c).

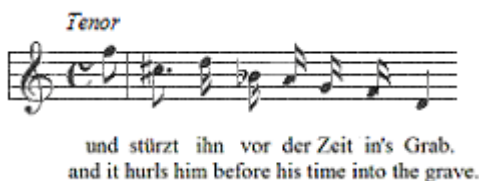


Ex. 1.22a. *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen*, BWV 49/3, mm. 15–16.



Ex. 1.22b. *Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig*, BWV 26/5, mm. 6–7.

⁴⁶ The idea of prostration is likewise expressed by a descending motif in the cantata *Wer sich selbst erhöhet* (BWV 47/3, mm. 17–19), the *St. Matthew Passion* (BWV 244/21, mm. 1–2; /22, mm. 1–2), and the *Christmas Oratorio* (BWV 248/58, mm. 11–12), etc.



Ex. 1.22c. *Es ist nichts Gesundes du meinem Leibe*, BWV 25/2, mm. 11–12.

Bach Generalizes their Meaning

Through a very natural association of ideas, Bach expresses, with the help of descending motifs, words in which there is a suggestion of weighty things, of loads, or heavy burdens.⁴⁷ Likewise, he translates events of the soul with the same kinds of motifs that he uses for external actions or events. For instance, in the soprano recitative from the cantata *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen* (We must enter into the kingdom of God through much tribulation),⁴⁸ after the lines that retrace the sufferings that the world brings to the Christian soul, Bach interprets to the letter the following words that paint it overwhelmed by the burden (ex. 1.23):



Ex. 1.23. *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*, BWV 146/4, mm. 15–16.

Through this formula, he translates here into sound what is only imagined in the text. Relying on the familiar means, he creates the musical counterpart of the image, and, in doing so, evokes the root of its feeling. His interpretation is so direct and so strong that the word “schwer” (heavy) seems to have an objectively

⁴⁷ We frequently find analogous material. Note the following examples: *niederlegen* (to lay down), in the bass recitative from the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele* (BWV 78, mm. 14–17); *zur Erde senken* (to earth descend), in the alto recitative from the cantata *Herr Christ, der einge Gottes Sohn* (BWV 96, mm. 4–5); *sinken* (to sink), in the duet from the cantata *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II* (BWV 60, mm. 44–50); *neigen* (to bend or bow), in the tenor aria from the cantata *Liebster Gott* (BWV 8, mm. 40–43, 60–66) and in the tenor recitative from the cantata *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit* (BWV 115, m. 2).

⁴⁸ See also the soprano recitative from the cantata *Siehe, ich will viel Fischer aussenden* (BWV 88/6, mm. 1–21).

determined meaning, as in this passage from an aria by Johann Fischer, where “schwer” is linked to the word “Bley” (lead), which lends a material sense to the metaphor “O heavy lead of sin that burdens us” (ex. 1.24).⁴⁹



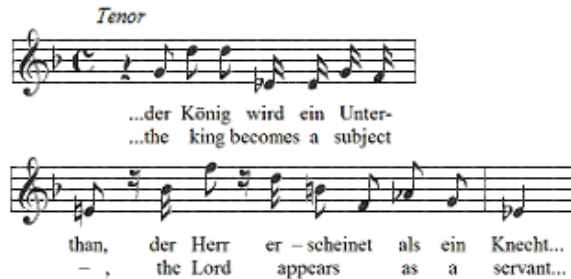
Ex. 1.24. Johann Fischer, *Himmlische Seelen Lust*, “Aria decima,” mm. 8–10.⁵⁰

The ideas of humility, poverty, and baseness are similarly evoked by Bach through motifs ending on low notes or ones that are cast in the low vocal register.

The tenor recitative in the cantata *Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes* (For this purpose the Son of God has appeared) contains several examples of this approach. The text reminds us that the son of God needs to become a little child, the king becomes a subject, and the Lord appears as a servant (exs. 1.25a, b).



Ex. 1.25a. *Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes*, BWV 40/2, mm. 6–7.



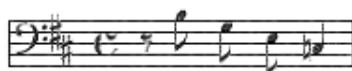
Ex. 1.25b. *Dazu ist ershchienen der Sohn Gottes*, BWV 40/2, mm. 10–12.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Fischer, *Himmlische Seelen Lust* (Nuremberg: 1686). This aria is accompanied by four viols and basso continuo for organ or violone.

⁵⁰ Bach similarly translates through a descending movement the idea contained in these words: “Welt, deine Lust is Last” (World, your pleasure is only a burden) in the cantata *Komm, du süsse Todesstunde* (BWV 161/2 mm. 1–2).

⁵¹ See also the motifs joined to the word “Demuth” (humility) in the cantatas *Es ist dir gesagt* (BWV 45/2, mm. 7–8) and *Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht* (BWV 105/2, mm. 1–3), and the interpretation of the word “Armuth” (poverty) in the cantata *Die Elenden sollen esse* (BWV 75/13, m. 1).

Bach even uses a subsiding of the melodic line to portray feelings that depress or humble and words that denote abjection, scorn, weakness, or fatigue. In different cantatas, we find the following motifs joined to words that express ideas of scorn, disdain, or contempt (exs. 1.26a–c):



Ich bin veracht'...
I am despised...

Ex. 1.26a. *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herr*, BWV 138/2, m. 1.



Lass', o Welt, mich aus Ver-ach-tung...
Leave, O world, me (out of) disdain...
(O world, in thy disdain, leave me)

Ex. 1.26b. *Liebster Immanuel, Herzog der Frommen*, BWV 123/5, mm. 9–10.



Ver-schmähe nicht...
Disdain not...

Ex. 1.26c. *Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen*, BWV 65/5, m. 1.⁵²

He represents the ideas of fatigue, weakness, sickness, and sin with figures similar to these we have just been examining (exs. 1.27a–c).



zu schwach...
too weak...


Ex. 1.27a. *Es ist das Heil uns kommen*, BWV 9/2, mm. 2–3.

⁵² Note that Bach follows the meaning of the word in this last example without being concerned about the negative that modifies it. The ideas of condemnation and curse suggest to him motifs of the same direction. Cf. BWV 60/4, m. 1; BWV 74/6, mm. 1–2; BWV 102/3, mm. 10–12. Cf. the use of motif A in Zachow, *Denkmäler Deutsche Tonkunst* (1905), series 1, 11:18.

die Sund'...
the sin...

Ex. 1.27b. *Es ist das Heil uns kommen*, BWV 9/6, m. 1.

Tenor



ich bin sehr krank und schwach...
I am very sick and weak...

Ex. 1.27c. *Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder*, BWV 135/2, mm. 2–3.

Lastly, Bach creates descending motifs or uses low notes to correspond with words that signify night and darkness (exs. 1.28a–d).

...noch viel Finster - niss...
... yet much gloom...

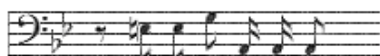
Ex. 1.28a. *Erfreute Zeit im neuen Bunde*, BWV 83/4. mm. 1–2.

wenn des Grabes Nacht
when the grave's night

Ex. 1.28b. *Erfreute Zeit im neuen Bunde*, BWV 83/4, m. 4.

hier ist ja lauter Nacht.
here is indeed nought-but night.

Ex. 1.28c. *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/7, mm. 5–6.



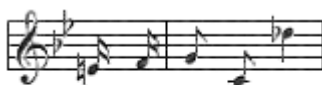
Es hat die Dunkel-heit
(Now) has the darkness

Ex. 1.28d. *Bleib bei uns*, BWV 6/4, m. 1.⁵³

* * *

If we grant that Bach represents an elevated object with a high note and a lower-placed object with a low note, then we might also think that he would use the distance between two sounds opposed in this way to express only the idea of space measured in the vertical dimension. But he doesn't make such an exclusive distinction. He also finds that the distance separating two consecutive notes of unequal pitch can carry a general meaning that serves him well for suggesting the notion of expansiveness in every sense.

In this vein, Bach gives the voice large melodic intervals for portraying the words "weit" (far) and "fern" (far away) (exs. 1.29a–c).



...kommt es doch so weit...
...comes it indeed so far...
(the point is reached)

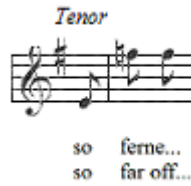
Ex. 1.29a. *Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende*, BWV 27/1, mm. 32–33.



ich ir-re weit und breit...
I stray far and wide...

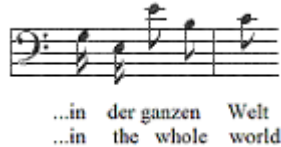
Ex. 1.29b. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/3, mm. 2–3.

⁵³ See also the alto aria in the same cantata (BWV 6/2, mm. 46–48).

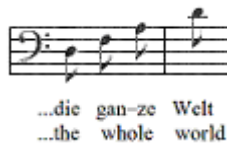


Ex. 1.29c. *Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen*, BWV 81/1, mm. 1–2.

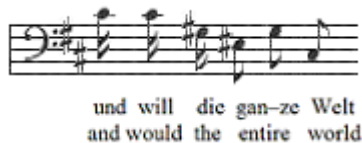
The idea of wholeness also suggests motifs to him of great breadth, and he readily creates them out of a major arpeggio spanning a whole octave. Perhaps he also remembers that ancient writers called the octave the mother of *all* intervals. If so, then this kind of musical image is all the richer because of that allusion. For the word “ganz” (whole, entire), he writes (exs. 1.30a–e):



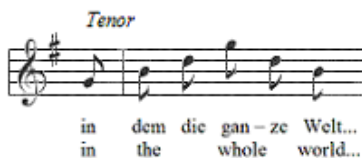
Ex. 1.30a. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/I/8, mm. 13–14.



Ex. 1.30b. *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*, BWV 115/3, mm. 11–12.



Ex. 1.30c. *Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kommt*, BWV 151/2, m. 8.

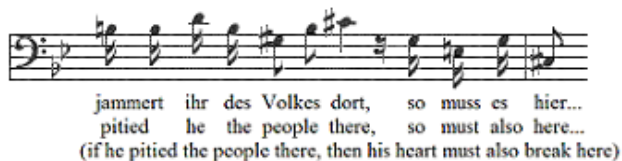


Ex. 1.30d. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/II/34, mm. 2–3.

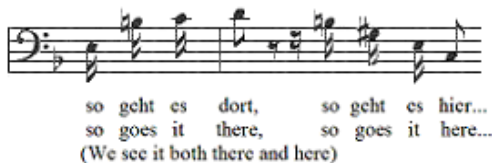


Ex. 1.30e. *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen*, BWV 103/3, m. 7.

Bach gives similar treatments to the word “Fülle” (fullness, richness) and its derivatives⁵⁴ and manages to interpret the idea of opposition by placing motifs with contrary meanings side by side. He brings out the difference between the adverbs of place—“here, there”—in a striking manner, and he distinctly interprets the words “to the right, to the left” (exs. 1.31a–d).

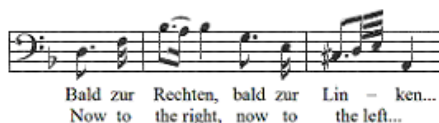


Ex. 1.31a. *Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht*, BWV 186/7, mm. 15–16.

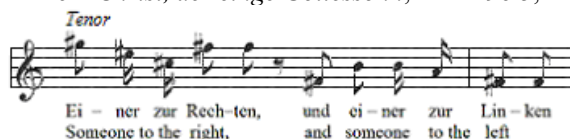


Ex. 1.31b. *Ein ungefärbt Gemüte*, BWV 24/4, mm. 17–18.

⁵⁴ See in the bass aria from the cantata *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren* the words “und die Fülle haben” (and have abundance) (BWV 10/4, mm. 38–39). See also the *St. John Passion* (BWV 245/27, m. 65) and the *St. Matthew Passion* (BWV 244/2, m. 2) on the word “vollendet” (finished, completed).



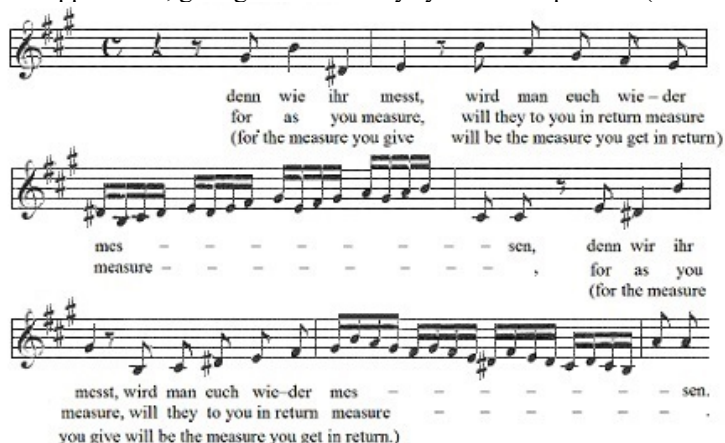
Ex. 1.31c. *Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn*, BWV 96/5, mm. 8–10.



Ex. 1.31d. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/II/64, mm. 23–24.

The Idea of Reciprocity

With the same artistry, Bach creates a musical image corresponding to the idea of reciprocity by using a procedure set forth in counterpoint treatises under the term “inversion.” In the alto recitative from the cantata *Barmherziges Herze der ewigen Liebe* (O compassionate heart of eternal love), we meet the words “For the measure you give will be the measure you get in return.” This phrase is sung twice, but when it is repeated, he rearranges the notes in the mirror opposite order of their first appearance, giving us two exactly symmetrical patterns (ex. 1.32).



Ex. 1.32. *Barmherziges Herze der ewigen Liebe*, BWV 185/2, mm. 19–25.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ The same symmetry is reflected in the bass part that accompanies this passage. Krieger employs the same procedure at the end of his beautiful motet for bass, *Wie bist du denn, o Gott* in *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, ed. Seiffert, (1905), series 2, 6th year, 1:145. In accompanying the word *umgewandt* (nimble, agile), the violin “reverses” the vocal line that the singer has sung on the first syllable of the word.

Motifs of Envelopment, Themes of Contortion

Bach's use of diverging motifs enriches his work with yet other images. We have just seen him use this inversion of themes to illustrate contrasting phrases, but sometimes he also combines patterns instead of opposing them. To express the actions of "surrounding" or "besetting," he lays out melodic lines that open in contrary directions, yet seem to undulate around the same point, radiate from the same hearth, or have the same axis of revolution. When he wants to interpret the words "I would embrace His cross," he creates a series of sonorous scrolls in the vocal line on the word "umfassen" (embrace). On a word with a similar meaning in another cantata, he lets a spiraling line unwind itself on "umfängen" (envelop) (exs. 1.33a, b).

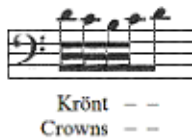


Ex. 1.33a. *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, BWV 12/5*, mm. 31–34.



Ex. 1.33b. *Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen*, BWV 32/1, mm. 48–50.

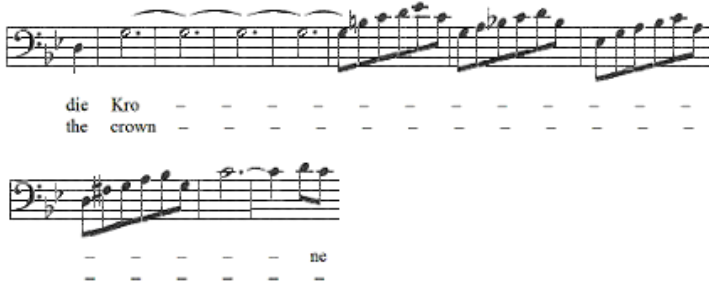
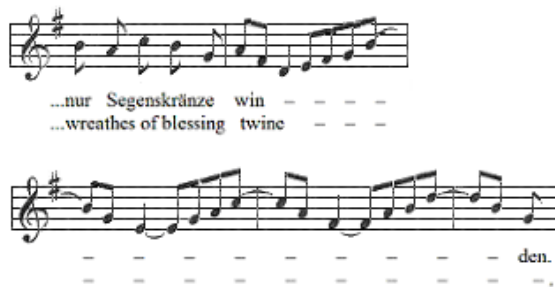
If the text mentions crowns or garlands, he groups the notes in enveloping arabesques whose very shape creates the image (exs. 1.34a–e).



Ex. 1.34a. *Herr Gott, dich loben wir*, BWV 16/3, m. 24.



Ex. 1.34b. *Der Friede sei mit dir*, BWV 158/3, mm. 17–18.

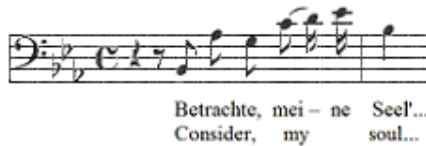
Ex. 1.34c. *Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht*, BWV 186/9, m. 18.Ex. 1.34d. *Selig ist der Mann*, BWV 57/1, mm. 91–101.Ex. 1.34e. *Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kommt*, BWV 151/3, mm. 62–66.⁵⁶

In this series of beautifully crafted depictions of objects and actions (crowns, the weaving of garlands) that he aspires to portray, Bach shapes these motifs in flexible contours, as if he wants to reflect the movements of a hand sculpting them in space with large, sinuous gestures.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ See also the bass aria from the cantata *Ich lasse dich nicht, du segnest mich denn!* (BWV 157/4, mm. 44–45, 48–49, 88).

⁵⁷ We should note here that it is the memory of the visible gesture that is shown in the representations that Bach conceives for the ideas of opposition and space. If we look at translations of the words “to the right” and “to the left,” we remember that these are influenced through the habits of an organist and clavierist. “To the right” is always interpreted by high notes, “to the left” by low notes—the constant associations of right and left on the keyboard. The influence of instinctive reactions, provoked by certain ideas, appears clear in the constancy of this interpretation.

As in all the preceding instances, we can see that the formulas Bach employs here have a double meaning. He combines his interpretation of the idea of “curve,” taken in the literal sense, with a figurative interpretation of the same concept. In a similar way, the word “betrachen” (consider) inspires him to create an expansive motif—one identical to the motifs he used to depict words where the idea of a circular movement is implied—since the word “consider” can mean “to look at from all sides.” And by a chain of thoughts whose working is easily imagined, he applies the same interpretational formula to words of associated meaning—ones which correspond in his imagination to the ideas of “turning over in one’s mind, repeating, reflecting,” and even, in a general way, to the idea of “thinking.” These next examples show us the process of this evolution rather well. The words represented are “consider, reflect on, think of” something (exs. 1.35a–c).



Ex. 1.35a. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/II/19, mm. 2–3.



Ex. 1.35b. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! I*, BWV 20/5, mm. 47–49.



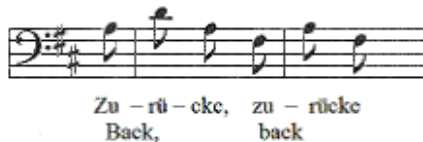
Ex. 1.35c. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! I*, BWV 20/3, mm. 72–79.⁵⁸

Return and obligation

Bach expresses the idea of turning back by crafting motifs where the ascending series of notes is connected to ones of the opposite direction. Heinrich Schütz already provided an example of this procedure, which appears below (ex. 1.36a) along with one taken from Bach (ex. 1.36b):



Ex. 1.36a. Heinrich Schütz, “Eile, mich, Gott zu erretten,”
Kleine geistliche Concerte, SWV 282, mm. 7–8.

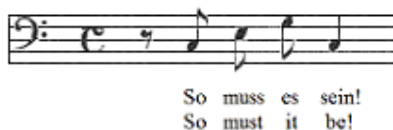


Ex. 1.36b. *Der zufriedengesellte Æolus*, BWV 205/12, mm. 32–34.⁵⁹

Likewise, Bach interprets the ideas of obligation or necessity with a motif that ascends and then returns to the very point from which it arose (ex. 1.37):

⁵⁸ See also the alto aria from the cantata *Bereitet die Wege* (BWV 132/5, m. 9) and the tenor aria from the cantata *Bleib bei uns* (BWV 6/5, mm. 7–8).

⁵⁹ This work was composed in 1725.



Ex. 1.37. *Du Sollst Gott, deinen Herren, lieben*, BWV 77/2, m. 1.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ For “müssen” (must) or “sollen” (should, ought) Bach often gives us motifs formed from an ascending arpeggio. We find the idea of obligation symbolized, as in the preceding example, by the constraint from returning to the tonic, whether in descending or climbing. We can point out this variant of the formula cited above in the arioso that precedes the alto aria from the cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen* (BWV 72/2, mm. 7–18) and in the opening of the cantata *Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim?* (BWV 89/1, mm. 9–15).

CHAPTER TWO

FORMATION OF MOTIFS

Motifs of tonal and consonant character. – Interpretation of themes composed of repeated notes, fragments of scales, or arpeggios. – The meaning of altered intervals. – Themes of distress and horror. – Chromatic motifs. – Descending chromatic series in 17th-century works. – Despair and being overwhelmed. – Ascending chromatic motifs and the idea of redemption, of transfiguration through pain. – Longing and tears.

Motifs of Tonal and Consonant Character

In certain cases we have seen how the meanings of motifs depend upon the ascending or descending notes that comprise them, and in this chapter we will study a less apparent element of interpretation: the relation of themes to the general tonality of the passages in which they appear. Whether its notes are scale-wise or separated by larger intervals, each motif can be appreciated and qualified according to the law that commonly governs notes following a certain order of modality or harmony, since there are some sonorous categories in which notes are found in regular groupings and a major or minor scale can be built on each note in their customary organization. Motifs can be formed in such a way that the regular elements of these scales predominate and the notes succeed each other according to the particular pitches of that tonality, consistently maintaining consonant relations among themselves. But they also can be constructed very differently, and the composer may frequently create them out of altered notes and mix dissonant melodic intervals into them. Therefore, we must consider two types of motifs: the

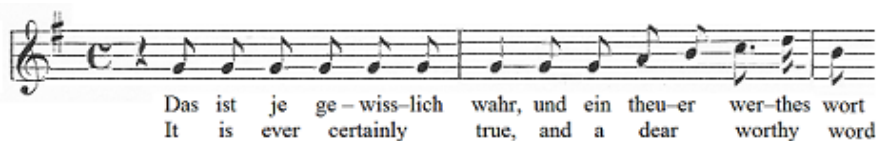
first is simple, easy to sing, and somehow seems natural; and the second is uneasy, unpleasant sounding, and has a harsh effect.

The first type of motif is suitable for expressing pleasant emotions, the second corresponds to trying subjects and painful feelings. Bach adheres rigorously to this meaningful distinction, and it is never by chance that he sometimes lays out smooth, flowing motifs and sometimes includes roughness, clash, and collapse in his themes. But he honors the text that he wants to accompany, and he is inspired by it to give his melodic phrases a more or less clear tonal coloring. He scrupulously follows the meaning of the words if they speak of well-being, of power freely unfurled, of action that nothing can hinder, of confidence, of continuous joyous energy. To do this, he remains faithful to the tonality in which he is writing and takes pains to avoid disturbing its clarity by using altered notes or questionable intervals. He groups the notes in scale-wise sequence or juxtaposes sounds that have a consonant relation to each other.

Interpretation of Themes Composed of Repeated Notes, Fragments of Scales, or Arpeggios

For enunciating more strongly the ideas of certainty, constancy, hope, or faith, Bach avoids using the variety available in scale segments or arpeggios in the key, and he confines himself to a pulsating of the words on the same pitch.

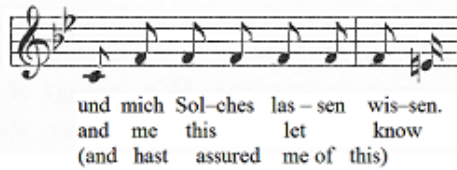
Thus we find, at the beginning of the cantata *Das ist je gewisslich wahr* (It is ever certainly true),⁷³ that Bach combines this vigorous affirmation with a series of repeated notes: “It is ever certainly true, and a dear worthy word, that Jesus Christ has come” (ex. 2.1).



Ex. 2.1. *Das ist je gewisslich wahr*, BWV 141/1, mm. 14–16.

⁷³ See in Schütz's *Johannes-Passion* the declamation of these words, sung on the same pitch with the exception of the next to last syllable that is raised one degree: “Ich bin der Juden König,” *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Spitta (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1885–1928) 1:140. [This cantata was composed by Georg Philipp Telemann according to Melvin P. Unger, *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996).—Trans.]

In the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele* (Jesus, who thou my soul) he combines a theme of similar structure with words that evoke the idea of certain knowledge (ex. 2.2a), and the idea of faith (2.2b).

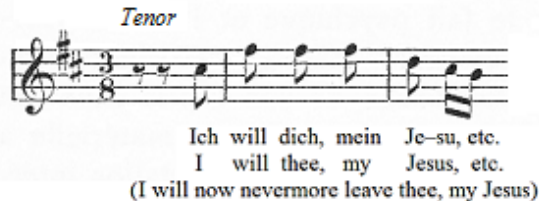


Ex. 2.2a. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/1, mm. 89–90.



Ex. 2.2b. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/6, mm. 34–35.

When he wants to express feelings of resolve or unyielding will he represents this steadfastness by means of a rigid and hammering motif. Thus, in the cantatas *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren* (My dearest Jesus is vanished) (2.3a) and *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in der Reich Gottes eingehen* (2.3b), the willful energy is reflected in the notes:



Ex. 2.3a. *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*, BWV 154/7, mm. 51–53.



Ex. 2.3b. *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in der Reich Gottes eingehen*, BWV 146/7, mm. 21–25.

The idea of faithfulness is also interpreted through notes whose melodic line remains unvaried (2.4a). Likewise, to symbolize unalterable submission to God's will, Bach uses an even figure in the first chorus from the cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen* (All things only according to God's will) (2.4b).

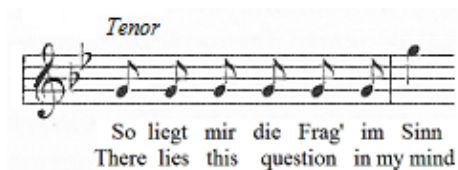


Ex. 2.4a. *Das ist je gewisslich wahr*, BWV 141/2, mm. 52–55.⁷⁴



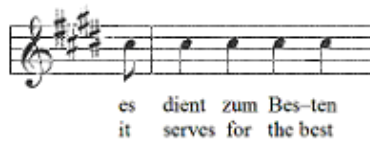
Ex. 2.4b. *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*, BWV 72/1, mm. 50–51.

To represent the captivated obsession that chains the soul to a single and indelible thought, a motif composed on the same pitch serves him in the cantata *Wo gehest du hin?* (Where goest thou?) in the passage “There lies this question in my mind: Man, ah Man, where goest thou?” (2.5a) And in the duet from the cantata *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I* (Ah, God, how many a grief), he accompanies in the same way a phrase presented in the form of the saying “It serves for the best at all times” (2.5b).



Ex. 2.5a. *Wo gehest du hin?*, BWV 166/2, mm. 44–45.

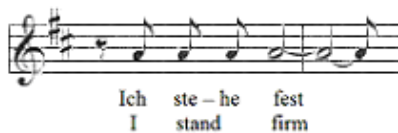
⁷⁴ [This cantata was composed by Georg Philipp Telemann. Unger, *Handbook*, 490.—Trans.] The steadfast protection of Jesus is also symbolized by a similar series of notes in the cantata *Ich bin ein guter Hirt* (BWV 85/5, mm. 17–19).



Ex. 2.5b. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*, BWV 3/5, mm. 54–55.

The idea of physical immobility also suggests motifs to Bach similar to these last ones. Here again he expresses with the same musical images the mental fact and the bodily attitude that our thinking and our language commonly associate. But we may ask what his reason is for this linking of figures? Does he pass from the material image to the intellectual one, or does he immediately skip this intermediary representation, finding an interpretation for the internal phenomenon through a sub-conscious superimposition of metaphors?

We would not know how to answer these questions even if we carried out a coordinated analysis comparing the dates of the works in which we find examples of this dual meaning. In fact, we have already seen that, in his system of thematic interpretation, Bach does not distinguish between the feeling and the action that characterize the same word-phrases. Any attempt at chronologically classifying the formulas he employs would be even more useless, because we have seen that most of the time he doesn't create the rules when composing motifs according to the words but, instead, he draws upon the principles guiding the musical language of his contemporaries. For example, in a cantata that Spitta dates from 1735, Bach gives us a representation of the concrete idea of steadiness composed according to the interpretations of certainty and constancy that I have just cited. He enunciates on the same pitch the words "I stand here by the path." So, even in the absence of any other evidence drawn from his earlier works, it would be naïve to conclude that when Bach conceived the music he devised the notational formula before he coupled it to the abstract notion of the underlying feeling. In a collection of arias that Bach undoubtedly knew during his youth, since it was published in 1697, Philipp Heinrich Erlebach—kapellmeister for Count Albert Anthon of Schwarzburg at Rudolstadt—used an inflexible motif with the words "I stand firm" (ex. 2.6a). And Johann Wolfgang Franck, in his opera *Aeneas' Ankunfft in Italien* (1681), interprets in the same way the words "Stay only firm, unmoved in undaunted courage" (2.6b).

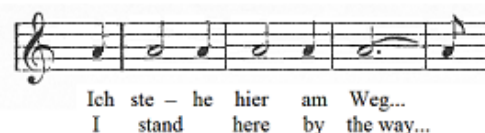


Ex. 2.6a. Philipp Erlebach, *Harmonische Freude Musicaklischer Freunde*, I/6, mm. 1–2.



Ex. 2.6b. Johann Wolfgang Franck, *Æneas' Ankunfft in Italien*, aria 31, mm. 1–3.

In the cantata *Gott fährt auf mit Jauchzen*, Bach writes (ex. 2.7):



Ex. 2.7. *Gott fährt auf mit Jauchzen*, BWV 43/9, mm. 62–66.

We cannot give a more striking example of obstinacy than this last one, in which Bach tenaciously repeats the tonic of this A-minor aria.⁷⁵

If, elsewhere, Bach combines the idea of movement with the idea of steadfastness in the text he wants to render, or if there is a question of following a laid out path, of directing oneself or being guided toward a definite goal, he gives us motifs whose notes conduct themselves in a continuous and precise order and are organized in scales or scale segments.

In the cantata *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich* (For thee, Lord, I long), the beginning of the second chorus is based on a nearly straightforward B minor scale that the voices, and then the violins, pursue over more than three octaves without inflection and without repetition to accompany the words “Leite mich in deiner Wahrheit” (Lead me in thy truth) (ex. 2.8).⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The idea of immobility is translated in the same way by Köhler (German motets, with handwritten title, preserved in the collections of Sébastien de Brossard, No. 2). We find a similar image in a composition by J. P. Krieger, *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst* (Series 1, 6th year, 1:142).

⁷⁶ This passage contains an obvious allusion to musical terms. We should remember that the word “scale,” in German, is translated as “Tonleiter” (tone leader).

Bass Tenor Alto Soprano Violin

Lei - - - (te mich), etc.
Lead (me), etc.

Ex. 2.8. *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich*, BWV 150/4, mm. 1–8.

At the beginning of the cantata *Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn*, the words “Walk on the path of faith” are sung on a uniform theme where the notes succeed each other by stepwise degrees exactly within the scope of an octave (ex. 2.9).

Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn
Walk on the path of faith

Ex. 2.9. *Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn*, BWV 152/2, mm. 14–17.

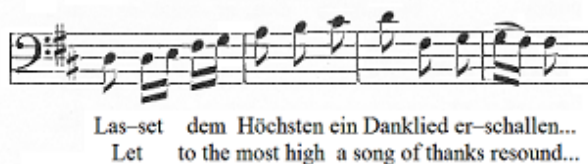
In the first aria from the cantata *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn*, Bach also spins out a motive formed from long diatonic sequences on the word “Bahn” (pathway) (ex. 2.10).

Be-rei-tet die Wege, be-reitet die Bahn
Prepare the roads, prepare the pathway

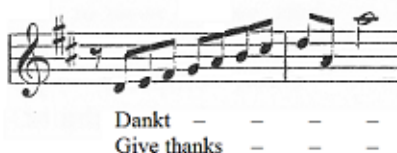
Ex. 2.10. *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn*, BWV 132/1, mm. 18–27.

As we see here, Bach resorts to similarly constructed images when the main elements proceed in even, fluent, and distinct melodic progressions to represent an easy and direct step and to portray a smooth road.

He composes analogous themes when he wants to express enthusiastic feelings, great soarings of the soul and the irresistible expansions of joy, thankfulness, and praise found in words such as “Let a song of thanks to the most high resound” (ex. 2.11a); “Give thanks to the highest wonder-working hands” (ex. 2.11b); and “Alleluia!” (ex. 2.11c).



Ex. 2.11a. *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen*, BWV 66/3, mm. 33–36.



Ex. 2.11b. *O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe*, BWV 34/5, mm. 16–17.

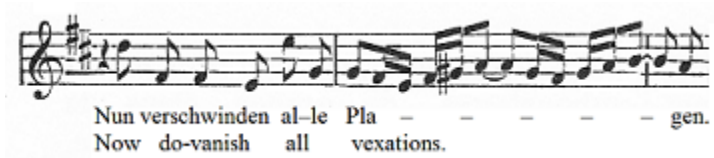


Ex. 2.11c. *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir*, BWV 29/3, mm. 20–22.

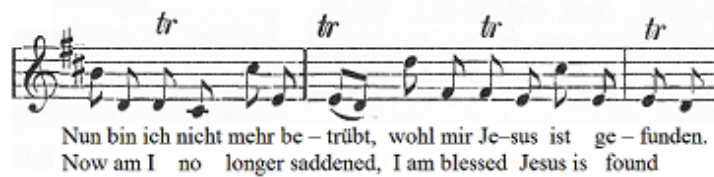
The exalted motifs welling up with these jubilant words are really nothing other than straightforward and continuous scales. The broad consonant intervals that blossom after them add to the magnificence of these lyrical tirades. Having unfurled them, the voice, which ascends again in wild leaps, seems to give a supreme example of vigor, an ultimate testimony to a superabundant life.

Moreover, these broad melodic figures, formed out of fifths, sixths, or octaves appear very often in Bach’s work, and his use of them is significant. These motifs exude a breath of cheerfulness in the happy arias that celebrate the deliverance of an oppressed heart or the liberation of a restrained soul, and they simultaneously bring with them ideas of a joyous and elegant force in which power and charm are fused. We encounter them coupled with the words “Now all

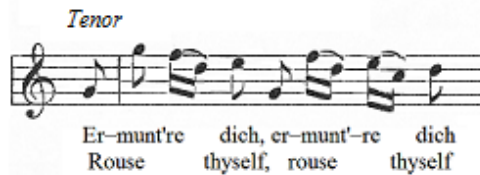
vexations do vanish” (ex. 2.12a); “I am blessed! Jesus is found, now I am no longer saddened” (ex. 2.12b); and “Rouse thyself” (ex. 2.12c).



Ex. 2.12a. *Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen*, BWV 32/5, mm. 11–13.

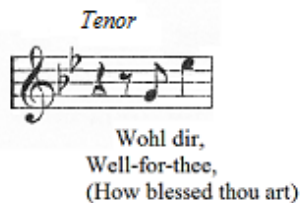


Ex. 2.12b. *Mein liebster Jesu ist verloren*, BWV 154/7, mm. 14–16.



Ex. 2.12c. *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele*, BWV 180/2, m.12–13.

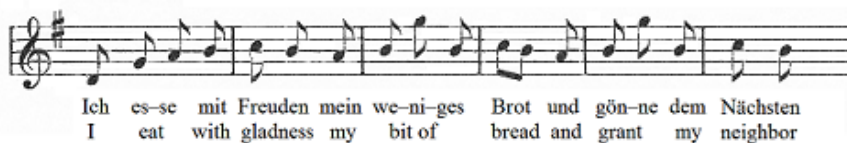
Bach uses major sixths equally for expressing wishes of happiness and for interpreting the bemused resignation that renders heroic the lives of the humble; for example, with the words “How blessed thou art” (ex. 2.13a); “I am content with my fortune” (ex. 2.13b); and “I eat with gladness my bit of bread, and grant my neighbor from my heart what is his” (ex. 2.13c).



Ex. 2.13a. *Ein Herz, das seinen Jesum lebend weiss*, BWV 134/3, m. 1.

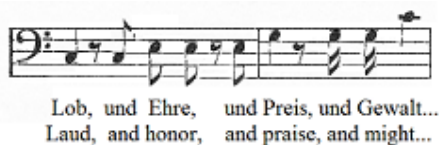


Ex. 2.13b. *Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke*, BWV 84/1, mm. 32–35.



Ex. 2.13c. *Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke*, BWV 84/3, mm. 25–30.

The themes in which Bach successively puts to work the main consonant intervals encompassed within an octave generally accompany texts that glorify the Almighty. We have already encountered such arpeggios corresponding to the ideas of totality and plenitude, and the same process reappears here; but its meaning is very different. It is true that the idea of plenitude still remains, but here the action gains the upper hand over the symbol. In the motif where Bach previously envisioned an image of immensity, traced as a large circular flourish, a sovereign outcry now resounds—vibrating in the echo of the victorious trumpets. And when, at the end of the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, the chorus intones “Laud and honor and praise and might be to our God from eternity to eternity,” its melody already contains the soaring of brazen voices that are going to proclaim it over and over (ex. 2.14a). If the Lord promises the faithful that he will break “Death’s mighty locked bonds with a strong and helping hand,” the melodic line shines above the words like a triumphant fanfare (ex. 2.14b).



Ex. 2.14a. *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/11, mm. 12–13.



Ich breche mit starker und helfen – der Hand des To – des ge –
 I will break with strong and helping hand death's mighty

wal – lig ge – schlos – se – – nes Band.
 locked bonds.

Ex. 2.14b. *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott*, BWV 127/4, mm. 44–48.

The same sumptuous calls announce the hero's approach. The glory of battles won rings out, just as do the alleluias springing from acts of grace: "The champion of Judah protects us still" (2.15a); "The champion of Judah triumphs with power" (2.15b); "They sing with joy of victory" (ex. 2.15c); and "Alleluia" (exs. 2.15d, e). These phrases all command the same boldness and are adorned with a similar brilliance.

Tenor



Der Held aus Juda schützt uns noch.
 The champion of Judah protects us still.

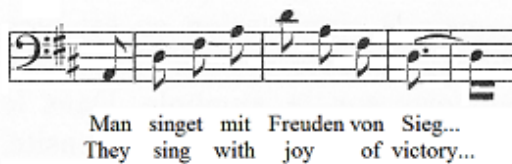
Ex. 2.15a. *Wo Gott, der Herr, nicht bei uns hält*, BWV 178/5, mm. 10–11.

Alto



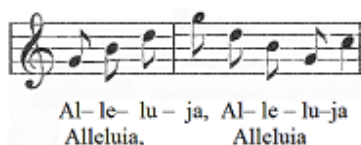
Der Held aus Ju – da siegt mit Macht.
 The hero of Judah triumphs with power.

Ex. 2.15b. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/II/30, mm. 13–15.

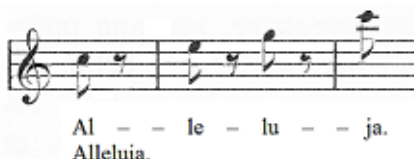


Man singet mit Freuden von Sieg...
 They sing with joy of victory...

Ex. 2.15c. *Man singet mit Freuden*, BWV 149/1, mm. 25–29.



Ex. 2.15d. *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/11, mm. 29–30.



Ex. 2.15e. *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen*, BWV 51/5, mm. 61–63.

The glorious words come back to life here like flashing visions of a stirring battle music.

Similar note configurations also accompany ideas of majesty and royalty. In the cantata written in Leipzig for the election of the city council in 1723, Bach joins a large major arpeggio to the words “How glorious is thy position, dear city!,”⁷⁷ and the beginning of the cantata written for the Mülhausen council in 1708 offers a similar theme on the first words “Gott ist mein König” (God is my king)⁷⁸—a motif which also appears in the cantata *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele I* (Praise the Lord, my soul) with the words “The Lord is king eternally.”⁷⁹

We find the same kinds of formulas in music of Bach’s contemporaries.⁸⁰ For example, in *Octavia*, an opera by Reinhard Keiser, performed in Hamburg in 1705, Nero sings an aria accompanied by two hunting horns that begins with the words “La Roma Trionfante” (Rome triumphant).⁸¹ Here are the first measures (ex. 2.16a) followed by examples drawn from Bach’s works that I have just mentioned (exs. 2.16b–d):

⁷⁷ BWV 119/4, mm. 2–3.

⁷⁸ BWV 71/1, mm. 1–3.

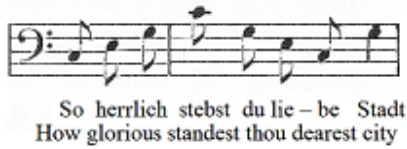
⁷⁹ BWV 143/5, mm. 4–6. [BWV 143 is probably a spurious work according to Malcolm Boyd, *Bach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 262.—Trans.]

⁸⁰ These fanfare motifs are also frequent and of deep significance in the works of the masters of the preceding century. I have already cited the climbing motifs based on arpeggios, and we can point out a theme that Werner Fabricius couples to the words: “Vicit leo de tribu Juda” (The lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered) in *Geistliche Arien, Dialogen und Concerten*, (Leipzig: 1662). Fabricius’s collection is prefaced by a confirmation in Latin verse by Heinrich Schütz.

⁸¹ The opera *Octavia* is published with a preface by Dr. Max Seiffert at the end of the works of G. F. Handel edited by the Händel-Gesellschaft Werken. – VI.



Ex. 2.16a. Reinhard Keiser, *Octavia*/13: *La Roma trionfante*, mm. 7–8.



Ex. 2.16b. *Preise, Jerusalem, den Herren*, BWV 119/4, mm. 3–4.

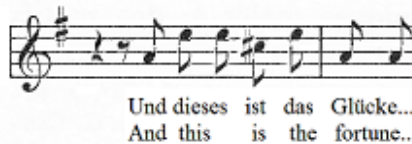


Ex. 2.16c. *Gott ist mein König*, BWV 71/1, mm. 3–4.




Ex. 2.16d. *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele I*, BWV 143/4, m. 10.

Bach also creates other motifs from an arpeggio on the major chord to express calm happiness, healing, consolation, and profound delight (exs. 2.17a–f).



Ex. 2.17a. *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten*, BWV 202/6, mm. 1–2.

Tenor



...dass er gesund worden war...
...that he healthy become was...
(...when he saw that he was healed...)

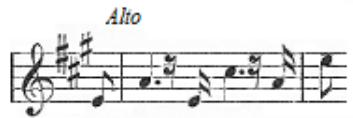
Ex. 2.17b. *Wer Dank opfert, der preiset mich*, BWV 17/4, mm. 2–3.



Getrost mein Herz...
Courage my heart...

Ex. 2.17c. *Schau, lieber Gott*, BWV 153/7, m. 1.

Alto



Ge-trost, ge-trost, ge-trost!
Be of good cheer!

Ex. 2.17d. *Ich freue mich in dir*, BWV 133/2, mm. 9–11.

Tenor



Ach süßer Trost!
Ah sweet comfort!

Ex. 2.17e. *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz*, BWV 138/4, m. 1.

Alto

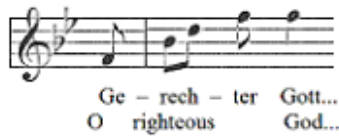


...der Sinnen Lust ge-niess'
...the senses' satisfaction

Ex. 2.17f. *Gott soll allein mein Herze haben*, BWV 169/4, mm. 2–3.⁸²

⁸² We can cite numerous other passages where Bach associates themes based on the entire arpeggio with words that express consolation, such as in the final duet in the cantata *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid II* (BWV 58/5, mm. 31–42) and the bass recitative from the cantata *Also hat Gott* (BWV 68/3, m. 3), etc.

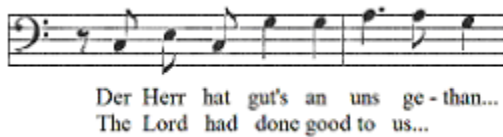
These strong and transparent themes are so directly linked in Bach's mind to words that speak of justice, powerful help, greeting, joy, and praise, that he obeys these words instantly and tirelessly as soon as they appear to him. They have barely shone forth in his imagination when the melody illuminates and ennobles them: "Righteous God" (exs. 2.18a, b); "The Lord has done good to us" (ex. 2.18c); "Praise God in his realms" (ex. 2.18d).



Ex. 2.18a. *Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim*, BWV 89/5, mm. 8–9.



Ex. 2.18b. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! I*, BWV 20/5, m. 10.



Ex. 2.18c. *Preise, Jerusalem, den Herrn*, BWV 119/7, mm. 17–18.



Ex. 2.18d. *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*, BWV 11/1, mm. 33–34.⁸³

An equal tonal vigor appears in phrases where Bach unfurls diatonic lines within consonant motifs. Here again, the straightforward and persistent scale-wise patterns in the vocal line correspond to the ideas of liberation and feelings of

⁸³ Several measures further on, the words "Gott ist gerecht" (God is just) are expressed in ascending order on the notes F, A, C, followed by the return to the initial F (BWV 20/5, m. 15).

intense joy. By extending the use of his tonal resources, the composer even creates representations of haughty and terrible might. A grand motif that encompasses all the notes of the scale is joined to the words “Rejoice, O my heart, for now the pain subsides that so long a time hath oppressed” (ex. 2.19a). And by constructing the same kind of theme, he interprets “Yes, yes, I can defeat thine enemies.” (ex. 2.19b) and “Lord, when our proud enemies snort with rage” (ex. 2.19c).



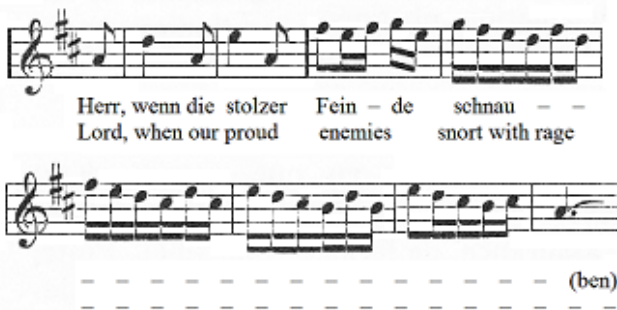
Er-freu - - - - e dich, mein Herz.
Rejoice - - - - O my heart.

Ex. 2.19a. *Süsser Trost, mein Jesu kommt*, BWV 151/2, mm. 1–2.



Ja, ja, ich kann die Feinde schla - - - -
Yes, yes, I can thine enemies defeat - - - -
- - - - gen, - - - -

Ex. 2.19b. *Selig ist der Mann*, BWV 57/5, mm. 23–26.



Herr, wenn die stolzer Fein - de schnau - -
Lord, when our proud enemies snort with rage
- - - - (ben)

Ex. 2.19c. *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/VI/1, mm. 48–55.

All the powers of the tonality serve to enhance this rugged music. The notes rush with the rigorous impetuosity of a flood tide that we know neither how

to divert nor how to avoid. These long, scale-wise sequences take hold of our attention and compel it. Our ear is too well shaped by the order of these unchangeable figures to remain inattentive to them. We involuntarily follow the familiar, tightly linked chain running all the way through them. It is a whirlwind of notes that leads us irresistibly in deliberate circles. Once swept up, we will ride on to where the wave will toss us, without recovering our bearings, to be carried on by the swirl of scales. At the same time, the stressed consonances bruise us with their expected jolts. In the motifs of joy, we have already tasted this fullness that suddenly flourishes as if we are actually experiencing it ourselves. Now the bursting forth of sounds torments us, and the torrent of melismas dazzles us. We feel assaulted and enslaved, and we experience this power as surpassing all measure. Far from invigorating us, it overwhelms us—no longer a help, but a threat.

* * *

The Meaning of Altered Intervals

As much as Bach lavishes bright themes on interpreting feelings of might and conveying images of a powerful and well-ordered life, he strives just as often to form harsh and disturbing melodic lines when he wants to translate feelings of uncertainty or to portray a painful and overwhelmed life.

We have seen that, with the obstinate declamation of words on a single note, he intends to represent ideas of assurance and inflexible steadfastness. On the other hand, for representing doubt he chooses large, wandering motifs that unfurl themselves haphazardly and that seem released from every rule of tonality. In the phrase “My soul is full of doubt, perhaps thou shalt reject my prayer,” he joins the word “zweifelsvoll” (full of doubt) to a melisma abundant with unsettling intervals and vague modulations (ex. 2.20).

Mein Ge-müth ist zweifels - voll, ist zwei - - - -
My mind is full of doubt, is full of doubt - - - -

- - - fels-voll, mein Ge - müth ist zwei - fels - voll
- - - , my mind is full of doubt

Ex. 2.20. *Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht*, BWV 186/3, mm. 22–29.

Even when the text only allows the anguishes of the troubled soul to be spoken of in passing, without as much emphasis as in the excerpt just cited, Bach laments them in phrases tormented by dissonant intervals. We could easily believe that he wants to make a spectacle of the singer's peril just to be certain of arousing the listener's anxiety. For example, in the tenor arias from the cantatas *Est ist euch gut, das ich hingehe* (It is good for you, that I depart),⁸⁴ *Ich glaube, lieber Herr* (I believe, dear Lord),⁸⁵ and *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*,⁸⁶ he combines descending diminished fifths in the vocal line with words that refer to the state of doubt ("Zweifel," doubt; "zweifelhaftig," doubtful; "Verzweiflung," despair).

Going astray and confusion are portrayed in faltering and disordered lines, and a tortuous vocal line is joined to the words "Spirit and soul become bewildered when they consider thee, my God" (ex. 2.21).

Alto

Geist... und See-le wird wer-wir - - - - -
 Spirit... and soul become bewildered - - - - -
 - - - - - ret.

Ex. 2.21. *Geist und Seele wird verwirret*, BWV 35/2, mm. 29–32.

We can compare this example, taken from the cantata *Geist und Seele wird verwirret* (Spirit and soul become bewildered), written around 1731,⁸⁷ to a passage from the cantata *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt*, composed around 1713, in which Bach describes the bewildered stride of those who allow themselves to be led along the paths of the world "on account of which they go astray from heaven" (ex. 2.22).

⁸⁴ BWV 108/2, m. 16. Notice here that Bach gives so much importance to the idea of uncertainty and leans exaggeratedly on the word "Zweifel" (doubt). The meaning of the phrase is, in fact: "No doubt can deter me."

⁸⁵ BWV 109/3, mm. 5–6.

⁸⁶ BWV 154/1, m. 12.

⁸⁷ BWV 35. [The first performance of this cantata was 9 August 1726. Boyd, *Bach*, 257.—Trans.]

Da - rü - ber sie vom Him - mel ir - - - - -
 On account of which they from heaven go astray - - - - -
 (On account of which they go astray from heaven)

- - - - - re ge - hen.

Ex. 2.22. *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt*, BWV 18/3, mm. 71–75.

We already find these outbursts that resemble the frantic beating of wings, this agitation, and these clashes in the melisma that Heinrich Schütz has written above the word “irren” (to be mistaken) in his paraphrase of the hymn *Von Gott will ich nicht lassen* (From God I will not leave). Here is the soprano line—performed with the bass—which unwinds on the words “In that must we not be mistaken about the devil’s cunning nature” (ex. 2.23).

Daran muss uns nicht ir - - - - - ren des Teu-fels lis-tig Art
 In that we must not be mistaken about - - - the devil's cunning nature

Ex. 2.23. Heinrich Schütz, *Symphoniae sacrae/II*, *Von Gott will ich nicht lassen*, SWV 366, mm. 73–75.

The movement of this wavy melisma with its syncopated rhythm is found repeatedly in Bach’s work, and the examples I gave above testify to this. To be sure, he has borrowed these elements from Schütz, but he has added an expressive coloring that is intensified by the build-up of altered intervals. These deformations of the tonality disturb us profoundly. They emit a particular anxiety: a kind of pain born from upsetting the tonal relations familiar to our ears, and we are continually surprised and deceived. Most listeners remain incapable of making sense of these impressions. The result seems peculiar to them, and they resent the anguish of the uncertainty. For them, the disorder is both harsh and incomprehensible.

Bach also symbolizes the devil’s ways by unleashing harsh tones.

For portraying Satan’s insinuating perversity that suddenly shatters the soul’s peace, he invents abrupt and insidious melodic sequences whose accompaniment also heightens the tonal incoherence. In the cantata *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt*, we read “Forbid, faithful Father, that the

devil's deceit should lead me or any other Christian astray," and Bach contrives to imitate the soul-piper's cunning through a series of treacherous intervals that risk adding the singer's failure to the Evil One's victory (ex. 2.24).

Wehre, dass mich und keinen Christen nicht des Teufels Trug,
Forbid, that me and no Christian the devil's deceit,
(Forbid, faithful Father that the devil's deceit should lead me or any
other Christian astray)

des Teufels Trug, des Teu-fels Trug ver-keh - - re
the devil's deceit, the devil's deceit should pervert

Ex. 2.24. *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt*, BWV 18/2, mm. 21–25.

In the cantata *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit* (Get thyself, my soul, prepared), he expresses the following words with a broad discordant motif: “Satan’s stratagem is without reason” (ex. 2.25).

Des Sa - tans List ist oh - ne Grund...
Satan's stratagem is without reason...

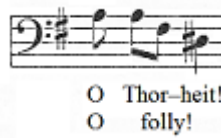
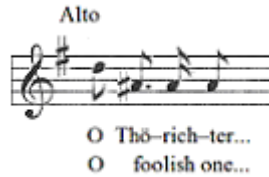
Ex. 2.25. *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*, BWV 115/3, mm. 7–8.

Bach also couples dissonant melodic formulas to words that connote irrationality. For instance, in the cantata *Was frag ich nach der Welt* (What care I for the world), the words “bethörte Welt” (deluded world) are accompanied by a contorted motif that alters by leaps (ex. 2.26a). In the same work (ex. 2.26b), and in the cantata *Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit* (Whatever my God wills, that be done always) (ex. 2.26c), we find similar examples.

Alto

Be-thör - - - - - te Welt, be-thör - te Welt
Deluded - - - - - world, deluded world

Ex. 2.26a. *Was frag ich nach der Welt*, BWV 94/4, mm. 7–9.

Ex. 2.26b. *Was frag ich nach der Welt*, BWV 94/5, m. 3.Ex. 2.26c. *Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit*, BWV 111/3, m. 1.

Themes of Distress and Horror

The motifs of pain and misery fall into the same category of dissonant motifs. They rise up like doleful moans and resemble cries from hopeless lips. Wide, discordant intervals overwhelm the melody—with the voice suddenly lifting itself up on the strident notes, and then falling back down as at the end of a sob. When Bach intends to portray the “heavy stones of sin” that oppress the Christian soul and that must be rejected, the theme he composes appears to stream directly from his lips, speaking of his own compassion toward his dejected brethren and bewailing his own suffering and the torture of his troubled conscience. It is a violent moan, tragically real. The voice leaps more than an octave in a heart-rending flight up to the minor ninth, which, when repeated, becomes harsher still, before dying away in a sequence of descending half-steps (ex. 2.27).

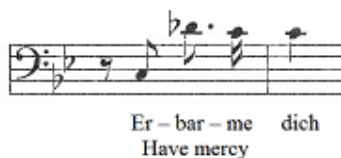
Tenor

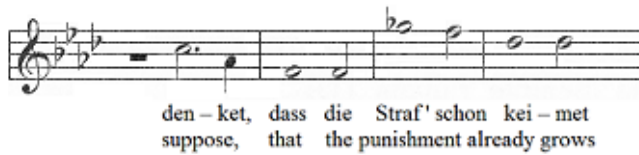
Wälz' - - - - ab die schweren Sünden-
Roll - - - - away the heavy stones of sin

stei - ne die schweren Sünden - stei - ne
- - - the heavy stones of sin

Ex. 2.27. *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn*, BWV 132/2, mm. 23–26.

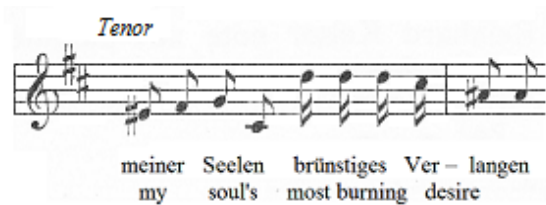
This example is from the cantata *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn* that Spitta cites as having been written for the fourth Sunday of Advent (22 December) in 1715.⁸⁸ Bach puts into practice here the advice of older composers on the subject of “exorbitant intervals” whose use they approve in dramatic passages.⁸⁹ In his *Passion*, Reinhard Keiser writes a similarly distressed outcry for invoking pity (ex. 2.28).



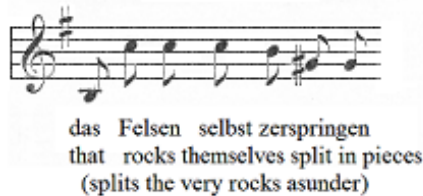


Ex. 2.30. Handel, *Brockes-Passion*, HWV 48/49, mm. 16–19.⁹¹

The same motif appears when Bach wants to bear down on a word that contains something excessive; for instance, when he speaks of a “burning desire” (ex. 2.31a) or an extraordinary event such as when Christ’s last words “split the very rocks asunder” (2.31b).

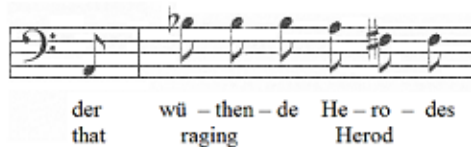


Ex. 2.31a. *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*, BWV 154/2, mm. 3–4.



Ex. 2.31b. *Leichtgesinnte Flattergeiste*, BWV 181/2, m. 17.

Within the realm of painful and frightful feelings, this heart-breaking motif takes on its fullest strength. Thus, Bach uses it for describing Herod’s wrath (2.32a) and for expressing abomination (2.32b):



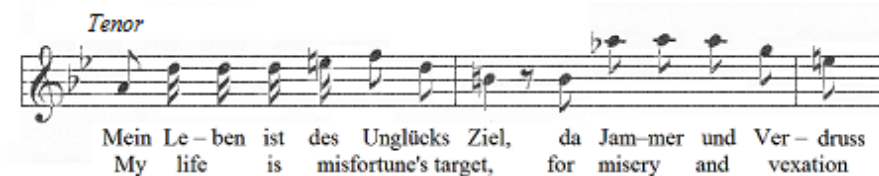
Ex. 2.32a. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid, II*, BWV 58/2, mm. 5–6.

⁹¹ Cited by Philipp Spitta, *J. S. Bach* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1880), 2:258.

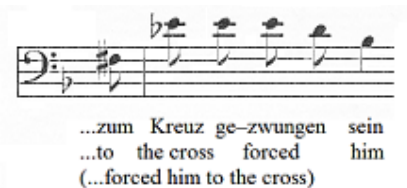


Ex. 2.32b. *Es reisset euch ein schrecklich Ende*, BWV 90/3, mm. 31–32.⁹²

We frequently encounter other themes in Bach derived from this motif of extreme distress. Movements of ascending sevenths or other dissonant intervals replace the leap of the ninth that so severely emphasizes its dramatic nature, but the repetition of the altered note remains. The harsh motif appears, always recognizable, when the text alludes to life's woes (ex. 2.33a), when it says that "we must be crucified in our flesh and blood" (ex. 2.33b), when we recall "the heavy burden of sin" (ex. 2.33c), when the singer evokes the painful ransom (ex. 2.33d), and when he cries out "O my soul, consider with anxious pleasure, with bitter joy . . . only your highest good in Jesus's suffering" (ex. 2.33e). It also accompanies Judas's recitative of desperate repentance (ex. 2.33f).

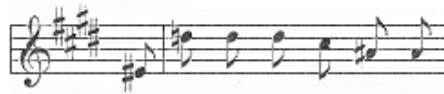


Ex. 2.33a. *Herr, wie du willst, so schicks mit mir*, BWV 73/1, mm. 20–22.



Ex. 2.33b. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/II/65, mm. 2–3.

⁹² See also the tenor recitative from the cantata *Es ist nichts Gesundes du meinem Leibe*, BWV 25. The same harsh exclamation figures in the example cited by Johann David Heinichen where it is joined to the first syllables of the word "Tiranno" (tyrant). Heinichen, *Neu erfundene und gründliche Anweisung für den Generalbass* (Hamburg: 1711), 187.



...die schwere Last der Sün-den...
...the heavy burden of sin...

Ex. 2.33c. *Wohl dem, der sich auf seinen Gott*. BWV 139/5, mm. 2–3.

Alto

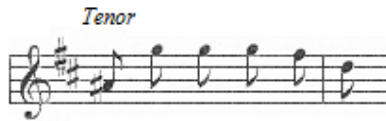
Ach! die - se Schuld ist schwerlich zu ver - be - - ten!
Ah! this offense can scarcely be prayed away!

Ex. 2.33d. *Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust*, BWV 170/2, mm. 15–17.



...mit ängst-li-chem Ver - gnü - gen...
...with anxious pleasure

Ex. 2.33e. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/II/19, mm. 3–4.



...ge - reu - e - te es ihn...
...repented is he...

Ex. 2.33f. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/II/49, mm. 10–11.

Bach's use of this persistent moan shows a remarkable tendency toward realism. The abrupt passing from the middle register, or even from the lower register, up to a higher note reflects the erratic change in a person's voice as it rises in a single leap when an emotion is suddenly uncomfortable, and more of those same high pitches are repeated at random until the disturbing feeling subsides.

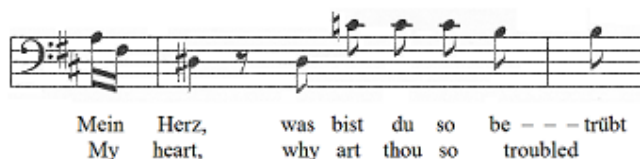
Chromatic motifs

Among variants of this lamentation theme we can cite the end of the tenor recitative from the cantata *Wachet! betet! betet! wachet!* (Watch! Pray! Pray!

Watch!): “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak; this forces a pitiable ‘Alas!’ from us.” On these last words we find a descending chromatic series emanating from the rising seventh (ex. 2.34a). On the contrary, in the second example given here, the ending is very simple; therefore, the phrase maintains a concentrated and unobtrusive expression. This example is drawn from the first recitative of the cantata *Der Friede sei mit dir* (Peace be with thee) (ex. 2.34b).

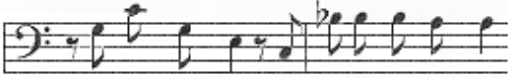


Ex. 2.34a. *Wachet! betet! betet! wachet!*, BWV 70/4, mm. 7–8.



Ex. 2.34b. *Der Friede sei mit dir*, BWV 158/1, mm. 12–14.

The same melodic formula is also combined with texts that suggest resignation. In these instances it is somewhat muted, but we find it still has the motif's characteristic trait: the repetition of a note that heralds a change in tonality. In the cantata *Schau, lieber Gott* (Behold, dear God), after a shimmering melodic pattern in the key of C, the voice rises up by a seventh from C to B flat and repeats the last note, which brings about a modulation to F major on the words “endure thy pain” (2.35a). In the cantata *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost* (Ah, dear Christians, be comforted), we encounter only the last part of this declamatory figure. The ascending seventh is missing, but the note that the voice repeats completes a sequence of re-descending minor thirds that, arpeggiated, evoke the harmony of a diminished seventh, and the melodic sequence is ultimately resolved through a cadence in G minor (2.35b). So, we pass from uncertainty to tonal precision. This melody—at first troubled, then darkened—also fits well with words that represent patience but leave discouragement to be implied: “O sinner, bear with patience what you have drawn upon yourself through your own fault.”



Getrost! mein Herz, er – dulde deinen Schmerz
Courage! my heart, endure thy pain

Ex. 2.35a. *Schau, lieber Gott*, BWV 153/7, mm. 1–2.




O Sünder, tra – ge mit Geduld
O sinner, bear with patience

Ex. 2.35b. *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*, BWV 114/3, mm. 1–2.


The tragic emphasis in great words of great sorrow, the harshness of biblical maledictions, and the exasperated moans distend the melodic line, tearing it apart in wide, discordant intervals. The torture and death of the Savior—"the wounds, the nails, the crown of thorns, the tomb"—are sung in a sequence of exclamations full of clashes and contrasts (ex. 2.36a). In a solo strewn with harsh leaps and muted descents Bach expresses the severe reproach: "Mankind is mud, stench, ashes, and earth" (ex. 2.36b).

Exhaustion, bitterness, and a feeling of incurable distress appear in groans where the voice struggles and succumbs, in turns, on the words "O pain, O misery!" (ex. 2.36c). Here again, as in the other examples, the disturbance of the tonality and the harmonic conflicts evoke the pathos of this tormented declamation.



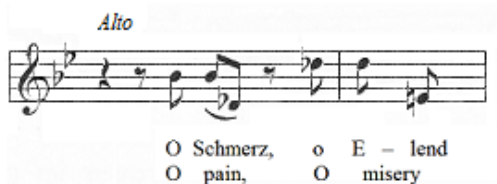
Die Wunden, Nägel, Kron' und Grab...
The wounds, nails, crown and grave...

Ex. 2.36a. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/5, mm. 1–3.



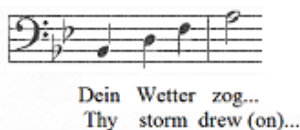
Der Mensch ist Koth, Staub, Asch' und Er – de
Mankind is mud, stench, ashes and earth

Ex. 2.36b. *Wer sich selbst erhöht, der soll erniedrigt werden*, BWV 47/3, mm. 1–2.

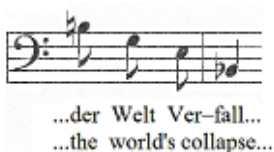


Ex. 2.36c. *Ich elender Mensch*, BWV 48/2, mm. 1–2.

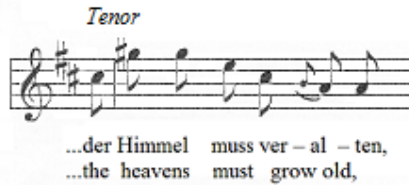
Sometimes, instead of letting the melodic line stray by leaps and bounds, Bach contains it within a run. He no longer interrupts it with sudden outbursts but steers it in a continuous movement along the scale degrees that pass easily through the harmonic intervals most familiar to singers. But these buildups of consonances set the stage for unexpected and disturbing discords, and the last interval of the progression bursts out with a sudden violence following the gentleness of the restful thirds from which it arises. We suddenly discover the strangeness of the motif—and the trap set by its premises—when the chain of consonances is upset by an unforeseen ending that brutally deceives the ear and mind. Such is the nature of these misleading themes. The notes of the tonic triad, arpeggiated from the tonic to the fifth, are followed in the same ascending melodic movement by a seventh that catches us by surprise like a wrong note and, as in the din of a storm, rumbles on at length: “Thy storm drew on from afar,” says the text (2.37a). A similar motif in the contrary direction constructed to tear apart the tonality resounds on words that proclaim “the world’s collapse” on Judgment Day (2.37b). In another instance, Bach creates a sequence of three descending thirds. The first two intervals form an arpeggio on the tonic triad, while the last one awakens the unpleasant impression of an incomplete octave. Moreover, the accentuation of this phrase with an appoggiatura where the final third dissolves renders the effect of this abnormal cadence even more palpable without weakening it. The words are: “The heavens must grow old” (2.37c).



Ex. 2.37a. *Schauet doch und sehet*, BWV 46/3, mm. 13–14.

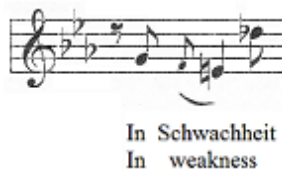


Ex. 2.37b. *Wachet! betet! betet! wachet!*, BWV 70/9, mm. 2–3.

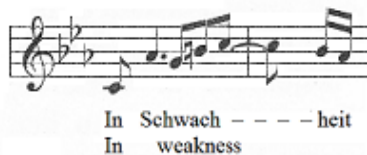


Ex. 2.37c. *Ich lasse dich nicht*, BWV 157/3, mm. 7–8.

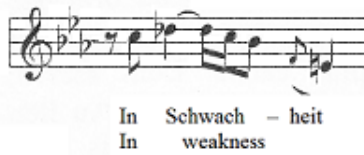
It is useful to note here that several of the examples that we gave in chapter one (exs. 1.26–28)—particularly the themes of contempt and gloom, in which we considered only the direction of the motif—also possess some dissonant aspects similar to those we are examining now. But we must also realize that, in Bach’s judgment, the significance of the altered intervals is greater than that of the ascending or descending direction of the melodic line. We saw in the preceding chapter that he readily interprets the idea of weakness with a subsiding of the sonorous line; but this means of expression alone is not enough for him, and he adds some harsh intervals to it. He is not satisfied with imagining an objective portrayal of weakness and symbolizing it by the falling of the vocal line. He wants more. He especially wants to incite compassion for this weakness; but the voice’s descent doesn’t seem to him to speak of it with enough pity. He needs it to seem tearful. So he forgoes the device of mere illustration and readily sacrifices the descriptive element for an emotional melodic accent. In the alto aria from the cantata *In allen meinen Taten* (In all my doings) he not only imitates, in a series of falling notes, the exhaustion of the soul weary from struggling, but he also vents the lament for its faded strength. Thus, we also find three quite different motifs for the word “Schwachheit” (weakness) that have only their bitterness in common (exs. 2.38a–c).



Ex. 2.38a. *In allen meinen Taten*, BWV 97/6, m. 33.



Ex. 2.38b. *In allen meinen Taten*, BWV 97/6, mm. 45–46.



Ex. 2.38c. *In allen meinen Taten*, BWV 97/6, m. 53.⁹³

Bach also shuns the common details of the picturesque in the beginning of the cantata *Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem* (Behold, we are going up toward Jerusalem) as soon as the feeling prevails over the description. It is true that some fragments of the ascending scale accompany these words sung by the bass: "We are going up toward Jerusalem." But, following this long, symbolic progression, the alto painfully declaims "O hard passage!" And on these words Bach no longer seeks to describe through ordinary processes the direction of this ascent by Jesus toward the city where he will be judged but, rather, to express the pain of the Christian soul at the punishment of its Lord. It is only after this tearful and remorseful reflection that Bach again crafts ascending lines—shocked and bitter ones—for the enunciation of the words "O hard passage! Up? O monstrous mountain . . . How bitter will be thy climb!" (ex. 2.39).

Alto

O har - ter Gang! hin - auf? O un - ge - heurer Berg...
O hard passage! up? O monstrous mountain...

Wie sau - er wirst du müs - sen stei - gen!
How bitterly wilt thou have to climb!
(How bitter will be thy climb!)

Ex. 2.39. *Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem*, BWV 159/1, mm. 10–14.

* * *

It is not only in these violent outbursts of sorrow and in these huge moans that Bach convulses the tonality. He also jumbles the harmonic order through less apparent digressions, and he unsettles the textural fabric through a more concealed

⁹³ In other instances, Bach employs the augmented fifth to express harsh pain.

skillfulness. Far from disrupting the melodic line, he tightens it more by contracting the intervals and bringing the stresses closer together. Instead of wielding with large flourishes the burning sword that dazzles and terrifies, he patiently fans its obscure flame with secret dissonances. The beginning of a simple chorale with voices in unison is transformed into a motif of pathos by altering a single note. The lower degree of the ascending fourth that it contains is raised a half-step, and the distorted interval takes on this disturbing ambiguity that alarmed the masters of the ancient law who worried about being unable either to define it as a third or to consider it a fourth.⁹⁴ In the chorale *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* (Now come O thou the Gentiles' Savior), Bach utilizes many times this characteristic variant that had already been employed by Heinrich Schütz.⁹⁵ But Bach did not adopt this deformed version by chance or just for the sake of varying some of the modulations. On the contrary, we see that, in making this change to the original hymn while using it in his work, he had felt that a profound interpretation of Advent could be drawn from it. As soon as the poetry invokes the coming of the "Savior of the Gentiles," the music seems, through this aching phrase, to foretell the sufferings that await Christ among his fellow men and the death they will subject him to. This need of remembering, simultaneously, that Christ's birth begins his work of redemption and that his death on the cross marks the accomplishment of his mission, is a tenet of Bach's religion. For example, he adapts the melodic line of the chorale "O haupt voll Blut und Wunden" (O head full of blood and wounds) from the *St. Matthew Passion* to greet Jesus's birth in the *Christmas Oratorio* on these words that are generally sung in a different key: "Wie soll ich dich empfangen?" ("How shall I welcome thee?").⁹⁶ This places Calvary in face of the Nativity from the very first moment, and the same feeling is revealed when we compare this altered opening of the Advent chorale with the theme of the chorus from the *St. Matthew Passion* in which the people demand in loud cries that Jesus be crucified: "Lass ihm kreuzigen" ("Let him be crucified").⁹⁷ Before the newborn Lord, who brings him the promise of grace in the *Christmas Oratorio*, Bach cannot forget the ransom of that grace and the sacrifice of the annihilated Savior. So, in the singing that greets the Messiah, he hears in advance the voices that will resound around Christ's condemnation.

If we should refuse to accept this interpretation, we would undoubtedly dispute it with the aid of arguments such as the following. We would argue that the resemblance of the motives cited is not exact, and that, even if their kinship is indubitable, it would still be foolhardy to claim that this similarity proves that Bach's reverent soul finds a correlation between the Messiah's coming to earth his painful death. We would also note that this alteration of the Advent chorale is met

⁹⁴ G.M. Artusi calls it a deformed interval in *L'Artusi, overa delle imperfettioni della moderna musica, ragionamenti dui Seconda parte* (1603), 9.

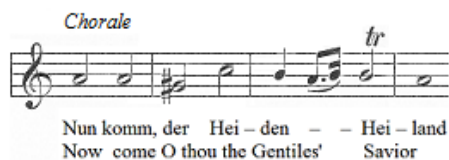
⁹⁵ Schütz, *Sämtliche Werke*, 6:20.

⁹⁶ BWV 248/5, mm. 1–4.

⁹⁷ BWV 244/54, mm. 35–43.

frequently in the works of Bach's predecessors,⁹⁸ and we would add that it is found in the first chorus of the cantata *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland I*, which was composed in Leipzig in 1714,⁹⁹ fifteen years before the *St. Matthew Passion*. At most, we would allow that, in writing the chorus of the *St. Matthew Passion*, Bach must have remembered the chorale in that altered form, and we would observe in passing that in the corresponding chorus of the *St. John Passion* we can also discern a reminiscence of the same chorale, even though it is evoked there without a chromatic transformation. And so we would conclude that these poetic and expressive correspondences that have just been pointed out between the two themes are entirely imaginary.

But to all this we could counter that Bach does not disturb the tonal clarity of the motifs borrowed from hymns without having a definite purpose. For his bitter version of the chorale is not justified by the text, which expresses the joys of hope rather than the expectation of distress. Moreover, the opening of the cantata is treated with a feeling of solemn joyfulness that corresponds well to the French overture form that Bach chose for composing it. But this moan in the theme (ex. 2.40a) is perfectly explained when we consider it to be a momentary allusion to the crucifixion. And our viewpoint gains further plausibility when we know that in a mass by Johann Caspar Kerl (1627–1693) the “Crucifixus” (ex. 2.40b)¹⁰⁰ is based on a subject similar to Bach's variant of the chorale *Nun komm, de Heiden Heiland*. This obvious parallel between Kerl's theme and the theme from the *St. Matthew Passion* (ex. 2.40c) was noted by Dr. Max Seiffert.¹⁰¹ Therefore, in view of the reasons cited above, I contend that, in spite of the differences in rhythm, Bach's altered motif in the chorale can be considered side by side with the themes of these last two works. Even if Bach has not used this motif in the chorale to translate words that refer directly to an account of Jesus's death, we can nevertheless agree that he has not embraced it in this form without a covert intention of evoking the memory of the crucifixion.



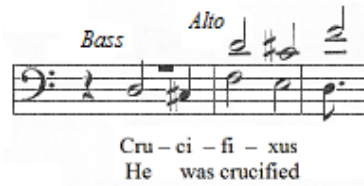
Ex. 2.40a. *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland I*, BWV 61/1, mm. 4–7.

⁹⁸ For example, in the organ chorale of Nicholas Bruhns (1665–97).

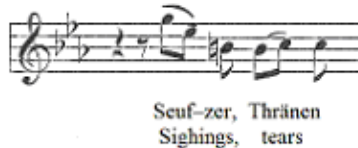
⁹⁹ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:500.

¹⁰⁰ This *Crucifixus* for four voices with basso continuo is found as a separate manuscript in the Royal Library of Berlin (Ms. Theor. 4° 160, folio 336).

¹⁰¹ Seiffert, *Geischichte der Klavier Musik. Herausgegeben als dritte, vollständig ungearbeitete und erweiterte Ausgabe von C. F. Weitzmann's Geschichte des Klavierspiels und der Klavierlitteratur* (Leipzig: 1899), 389.

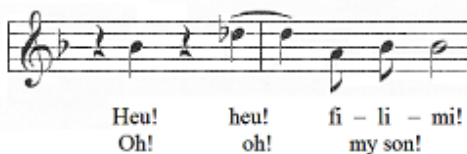
Ex. 2.40b. Johann Caspar Kerl, *Mass*/3, mm. 59–61.Ex. 2.40c. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/II/54, mm. 7–9.

The same interval of a diminished fourth in its descending form gives a bitter accent to the melodic line in the aria with chorale found at the beginning of the cantata *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe* (I stand with one foot in the grave) on the words “Soon my ailing body falls thereunto” (2.41a). In the soprano aria from the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* we see it joined to the words “Sighings, tears” (2.41b).

Ex. 2.41a. *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe*, BWV 156/2, mm. 34–36.Ex. 2.41b. *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/3, m. 8.

We can also cite other examples of the expressive use of this interval in works of the 17th century. Carissimi uses it to voice the true mother’s moan in the *Judgment of Solomon* (2.42a). Johann Valentin Meder (1649–1719) applied it to

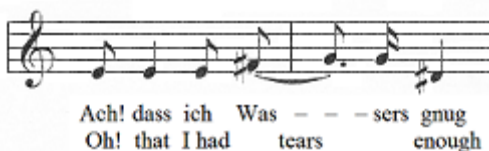
the words “My heart is languishing” (2.42b). Lastly, Heinrich Bach (1615–92) repeats it several times in his motet “Oh! that I had enough water swelling in my head and tears in my eyes to weep night and day for my sins!” (2.42c).



Ex. 2.42a. Carissimi, *Judgment of Solomon*/6, mm. 7–8.¹⁰²



Ex. 2.42b. Johann Valentin Meder, *Languet cor meum*, mm. 15–18.



Ex. 2.42c. Heinrich Bach, *Ach! dass ich Wassers g'nug*, mm. 10–11.

Bach also uses chromatic alterations for matching his melodies to lyrics of sadness and terror. He lets the melodic line wander among dissonant notes, and the phrases modulate strangely and mournfully. The notes are no longer grouped in clear-cut patterns familiar to the ear, and a series of notes that would customarily be drawn together is distorted. In place of the resounding cadences that mark the flowing discourse of the joyful arias, and instead of their anticipated straightforward evolutions, Bach multiplies tortuous movements and incongruous sequences. He does not allow expected resolutions, and he disguises the awaited patterns. Through the slightest touch or blending, limpid consonances and wholesome scales are afflicted with deceptive pains. Lowering or raising their degrees is enough to render them unnatural, and in spite of the bitterness of the diminished fourths that we have just observed, the modulation of passages that contain them remains understandable. The disturbance of tonality is confined to the altered interval itself, and a normal resolution soon lays to rest the uncertainty that

¹⁰² This oratorio scene is found in the *Continuatio theatri musici seu sacrarum Cantionum par secunda, quas aperuit Samuel Capricornus* (Bockshorn), Würzburg: 1669.

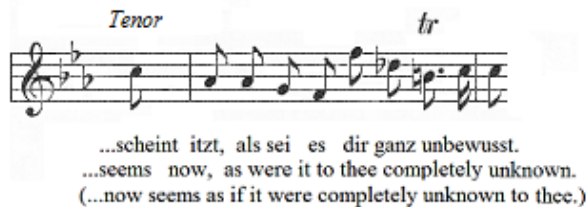
has been stirred up. Corruption of the thirds most profoundly disturbs the tonality. Diminished, they degenerate into mongrel seconds that disrupt the usual modal range. Sometimes, in the middle of a musical phrase, they seem to reproduce the actual strain of a doleful utterance, and we would readily believe that the vocal line breaks off its usual course to make room for the impassioned declamation.

In the works of Philipp Heinrich Erlebach, one of the most expressive German masters of the late 17th century, we find the use of diminished thirds. At the end of the second part of his aria “Meine Seufzer” (My sigh), before the reprise, he resorts to using one on the words “Oh! Why do you lock yourself away?” (ex. 2.43a).

In the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, dated by Spitta from 1714, we are given an example of the diminishing of a third in the next to last measure of the tenor recitative that ends on these words: “I call and cry after thee, but my ‘Woe and Ah’ seems now as if it were completely unknown to thee” (ex. 2.43b). Altered thirds are also found in the duet from the cantata *Alles, was von Gott geboren* (All that is born of God), composed, according to Spitta, for the third Sunday of Lent in the year 1716 (15 March) and included in its entirety within the later cantata *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* (A mighty fortress is our God). The altered thirds are joined to words completing a sentence that sings of the victories promised to the Christian who “faithfully carries God” in his heart. The melodic line darkens, and the thought of the proclaimed triumph is not enough to sustain its joy when the poet evokes the hours of anguish or the extinguished life: “and the unconquered heart will at last be crowned when it has overcome death” (ex. 2.43c).



Ex. 2.43a. Philipp Erlebach, *Harmonische Freude*, I/14, mm. 59–62.



Ex. 2.43b. *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/4, mm. 16–17.



wenn es den Tod, den Tod er – legt
when it death, death has slain

Ex. 2.43c. *Alles, was von Gott geboren*, BWV 80/7, mm. 88–90.

The soul's distress at the idea of death is reflected in a similar motif at the end of the arioso preceding the alto aria in the cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*. Here again, Bach's imagination is captivated by funereal figures at the mere evocation of the word designating death, and he lingers there with a mournful deference (ex. 2.44a). Diminished thirds are also united with words that describe harmful objects, evil acts, a wretched state ("Dorn," thorn;¹⁰³ "Flecken," stains;¹⁰⁴ "Missethat," misdeeds; "armer," poverty¹⁰⁵). Thus, we see Bach making use of the diminished third from D flat to B natural in this segment of the recitative "Reckon against me not the misdeeds, which have angered thee, Lord!" (ex. 2.44b).

Alto



Herr, so du willst, so sterb' – – – – ich nicht
Lord, if thou wilt, then die – – – – I not
(Lord, if thou wilt, then I shall not die)

Ex. 2.44a. *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*, BWV 72/2a, mm. 52–56.

Tenor



Rech-ne nicht die Mis-se-that
Reckon against me not the misdeeds
(Do not reckon the misdeeds against me)

Ex. 2.44b. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/3, mm. 20–21.

Pushed to the extreme, these alterations completely break up the foundations of tonality. It becomes grounded in uncertainty, and the constant chromatic chaos submerges the normal scale sequences. They disappear, and the

¹⁰³ Cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen* (BWV 72/2 m. 21).

¹⁰⁴ Cantata *Wo soll ich fliehen hin* (BWV 5/3 m. 83).

¹⁰⁵ Cantata *Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kommt* (BWV 151/2, m. 14).

limits of the modes dissolve as in a rough and foggy sea. The half-steps follow each other, marching past in amorphous groupings and dispersing themselves indiscriminately. The rhythm and harmony hardly allow us to perceive any order in the flight of this surge that streams by us all scrambled together. Our minds no longer recognize in it the usual logic of melodic construction. In fact, these indefinite passages contain neither standard chord progressions nor regular cadences, and we can't foresee their resolution. We know not where they lead, but this discordant monotony, in which all sensibility is lost, still moves us profoundly. Laid down in the same direction, the chromatic notes fall, one after the other, without promising or resolving anything. They seem governed by an obscure and heart-breaking fate.

Bach always uses motifs formed out of leading tones in this manner deliberately. He constantly pairs them with words of painful import. Moreover, he varies their modeling. At times the chromatic sequence is reduced to three notes comprising the interval of a whole step, and here are several examples of that formation, joined to the words "sinful corruption" (ex. 2.45a); "the fear of death" (ex. 2.45b); "but ah" (ex. 2.45c).



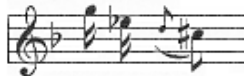
...aus diesem sündlichen Verderben
...out of this sinful corruption

Ex. 2.45a. *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*, BWV 114/3, mm. 18–19.



...dass ein Herz der To – desfürcht vergiesst
...that a heart death's fear forgets
(...that our heart forgets the fear of death)

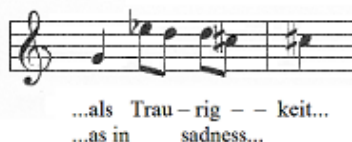
Ex. 2.45b. *Erfreute Zeit im neuen Bunde*, BWV 83/2, mm. 46–48.



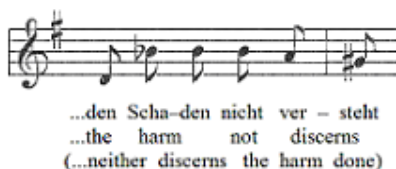
A-ber ach!
But ah!

Ex. 2.45c. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! I*, BWV 20/2, m. 6.

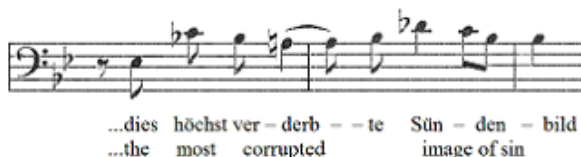
We also find the same motif preceded by a large ascending interval, akin to a doleful vocal outpouring, and Bach makes this utterance clear when the text evokes the idea of sadness (ex. 2.46a), harm (ex. 2.46b), or corruption (ex. 2.46c).



Ex. 2.46a. *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*, BWV 72/1, mm. 33–34.



Ex. 2.46b. *Leichtgesinnte Flattergeister*, BWV 181/2, mm. 7–8.



Ex. 2.46c. *Herr, wie du willst*, BWV 73/4, mm. 36–38.

Descending chromatic series in 17th-century works

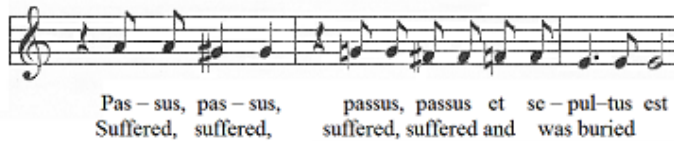
Likewise, Bach uses the descending chromatic theme, generally made up of notes comprising the interval of a fourth, for portraying feelings of affliction. Through the meaning he gives this chromatic sequence and the frequency of his use of it, he further reveals himself to be a faithful observer of expressive traditions established in the 17th century and long respected by composers. In fact, we find an infinite number of examples of this descending chromatic theme in works from that era. It is a characteristic formula for expressing lamentation, and it is repeated insatiably. But in spite of its excessive use, its force never diminishes, and the composers who realize its efficacy don't seek beyond it.

Heinrich Schütz adapts this motif to the troubled prayer he voices in one of his short sacred choruses: “When our eyes close in sleep, keep our hearts awake; extend over us your right hand, for fear lest we fall into sin and shame” (ex. 2.47a). On the same lines, Sebastian Anton Scherer expresses the verse “Passus et sepultus est” (He suffered and was buried) in the “Credo” of his mass for five voices, the first of several masses in a collection of sacred music that he published in 1657 (ex.

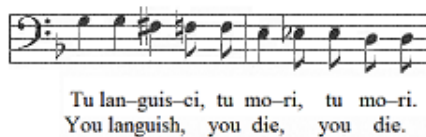
2.47b). And Angelino Bontempi cites, in his *Historia musica*, a passage in five parts where the same chromatic sequence is stated successively by each of the voices and corresponds to a doleful text (ex. 2.47c).



Ex. 2.47a. Heinrich Schütz, *Kleine geistliche Concerte*, Vol. 6, No. 11, 2 mm.

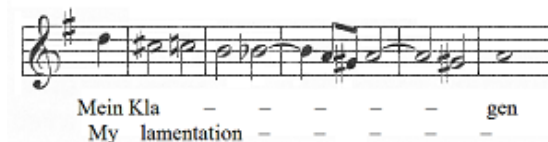


Ex. 2.47b. Sebastian Scherer, "Credo/Passus," *Missae, Psalmi, et Motteti a 3, 4, 5 Vocibus cum Instrumentis/Mass I*, mm. 17–19.

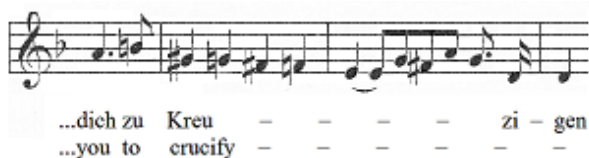


Ex. 2.47c. Angelino Bontempi, *Historia musica . . . Perugia*, mm. 19–20.

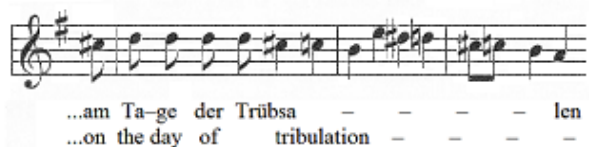
In a work composed to the words of the hymn *Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ* (I call to thee, Lord Jesus Christ), Nicolaus Adam Strunck (1640–1700) ends, on a sequence of descending half-steps, his invocation "I call to thee, Lord Jesus Christ, hear my cry" (ex. 2.48a). Handel expresses the verb "kreuzigen" (to crucify) with a similar motif in his *Passion According to St. John*, set to Christian Heinrich Postel's verse (ex. 2.48b). And in a work published in 1706, Johann Christoph Kridel similarly accompanies the words "on the day of tribulation" (ex. 2.48c).



Ex. 2.48a. Nicolaus Adam Strunck, *Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*, mm. 296–301.

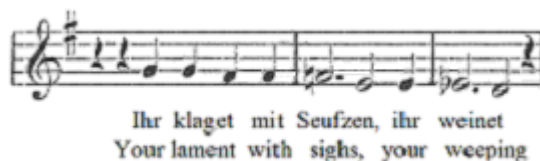


Ex. 2.48b. Georg Böhm, *Passion nach dem Evangelisten Johannes* [formerly attributed to Handel.—Trans.], I/22, mm. 8–11.



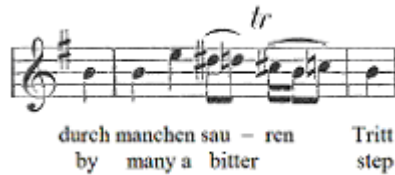
Ex. 2.48c. Johann Kridel, *Neu eröffnetes Blumen-Gärtlein*, III/5, mm. 3–5.

The descending chromatic theme already appears in the cantata *Denn du wirst meine Seele nicht in der Hölle lassen* (Because Thou leaves not my soul in hell), which Spitta believes to be the first cantata Bach wrote that is preserved for us and can be credibly dated to 1704.¹⁰⁶ This work would therefore somewhat precede the compositions from which the two examples just cited are drawn. Here Bach unites the chromatic motif with the words “You lament with sighs, you weep” (2.49a). In another work from his youth, the cantata *Gott ist mein König*, composed for the installation of a new city council in the free imperial city of Mühlhausen in Thuringia (February 4, 1708), he transforms a descending diatonic phrase from the chorale *O Gott, du frommer Gott* (O God, Thou righteous God) into a chromatic sequence to accompany the words “by many a bitter step” (2.49b). And the cantata *Nach dir Herr, verlanget mich*, undoubtedly composed before 1712, gives us another example of a meaningful use of the chromatic theme, which serves to interpret the avid and sorrowful desire of the soul intoxicated with God (2.49c).



Ex. 2.49a. *Denn du wirst meine Seele nicht in der Hölle lassen*, BWV 15/7, mm. 12–14.

¹⁰⁶ BWV 15. [This cantata was composed by Johann Ludwig Bach. Unger, *Handbook*, 51.—Trans.]



Ex. 2.49b. *Gott ist mein König*, BWV 71/2, mm. 21–23.




Ex. 2.49c. *Nach dir, Herr, verlangt mich*, BWV 150/2, mm. 2–4.

Despair and Being Overwhelmed

This motif, whose expressive function is already shown so clearly in Bach's early works, is also found with the same character in a great number of his compositions. He never tires of repeating it in his lamentations. Bitterness is first of all dear to him in and of itself, as well as for the many harmonic surprises it evokes. Furthermore, he reckons that this harsh sequence, having become familiar to listeners, brings them definite messages and clearly transmits both the poet's and his own intentions. Thus, his tenacious predilection for the chromatic formula arises both from his inexhaustible power to renew it and his confidence that it will remain understandable. It is quite easy to cite a whole series of examples that show us his consistency in this significant use of the chromatic theme—all the way from his youth right up through his last years.

The cantata *Christen, ätzt diesen Tag* (Christians, etch this day), written for Christmas Day in 1723, contains a descending chromatic passage that corresponds to the end of the phrase "That Satan should torment us" (2.50a). In the cantata *Christ lag in Todes Banden* (Christ lay in death's bonds), which Spitta assigns with probability to Easter Day (April 9) in 1724, the basses sing a short chromatic motif on the last words of the phrase "Christ lay in death's bonds given for our sin" (2.50b). The words "Weinen, Klagen" (weeping, wailing), are accompanied by a similar but more developed sequence in the cantata assigned to the following Jubilate Sunday, April 30, 1724 (2.50c). And we hear a segment of the descending chromatic scale when the text recalls Satan's cruelty in the cantata written for St. Michael's Day in the same year (September 29, 1724), (2.50d).

Tenor



Dass uns Sa - tan mü - ge quälen
That us Satan should torment
(That Satan should torment us)

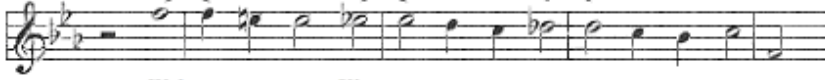
Ex. 2.50a. *Christen, ätzt diesen Tag*, 63/7, mm. 50–52.



für un - ser Sünd' ge - ge - ben
for our sin given
(given for our sin)

Ex. 2.50b. *Christ lag in Todes Banden*, BWV 4/2, mm. 9–10.

Tenor



Wei - - nen, Kla - - - - - gen
Weeping, wailing - - - - -

Ex. 2.50c. *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*, BWV 12/2, mm. 19–23.



Grau - - - - - sam - keit
Ferocity - - - - -

Ex. 2.50d. *Es erhub sich ein Streit*, BWV 19/1, mm. 76–79.

The harsh melodic sequence also occurs when we come to a passage from the hymn where Luther evokes the memory of the devil, this “ancient evil foe” whose “fearsome armor” is forged with power and cunning, in the cantata *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, undoubtedly sung for the Reformation celebration in 1730 (2.51a).

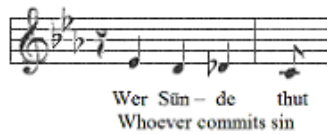
Several lines of the same theme are met as well in the cantata *Widerstehe doch der Sünde* (Resist indeed sin), probably written a few years after 1730.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰⁷ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:305. [The first performance of this cantata (BWV 54) is thought to be March 24, 1715, according to Boyd, *Bach*, 258.—Trans.]

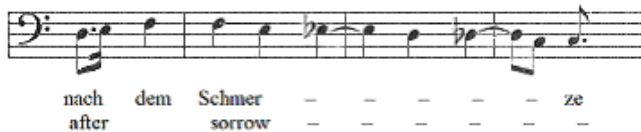
word “sin” is portrayed here as in the Easter cantata cited above (2.51b). Elsewhere, the motif is stated in its entirety on the word “sorrow” at the end of the first duo in the cantata *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid II*, which Spitta estimates to have been composed for January 4, 1733 (2.51c).



Ex. 2.51a. *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, BWV 80/1, mm. 197–199.



Ex. 2.51b. *Widerstehe doch der Sünde*, BWV 54/3, mm. 9–10.



Ex. 2.51c. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid II*, BWV 58/1, mm. 78–81.¹⁰⁸

This typical sequence is presented at the end of the first aria from the cantata *Ich armer Mensch* (I, wretched man), which Spitta assigns to the twenty-second Sunday after Trinity in 1731 or 1732.¹⁰⁹ It is joined to the words: “I, wretched man” (2.52a). Other works from only a few years after this one give us similar examples. We can cite them in the cantatas destined, according to Spitta, for Easter Monday¹¹⁰ and the Feast of the Ascension in 1735.¹¹¹ In them Bach concisely interprets the words “grieving, fearing, anxious trepidation, all alone,” and cantatas from the following years contain melodic arrangements of the same intent. When the text evokes the memory of Christ’s death in the cantata *Ach Gott*,

¹⁰⁸ Bach wrote two cantatas on this chorale. This one is the first. [BWV 58 was first performed on 27 October 1726, and the other, BWV 3, was first performed on 14 January 1725 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 256, 258.—Trans.]

¹⁰⁹ BWV 55. [The first performance of this cantata is dated as 17 November 1726 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 258.—Trans.]

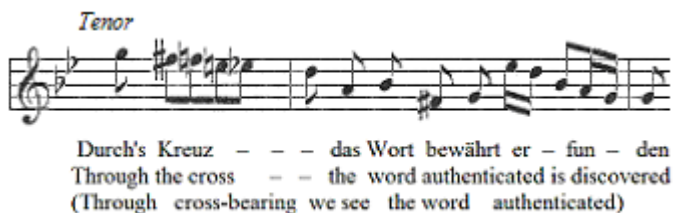
¹¹⁰ *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen*, BWV 66, p. 181.

¹¹¹ *Gott fährt auf mit Jauchzen*, BWV 43, p. 123.

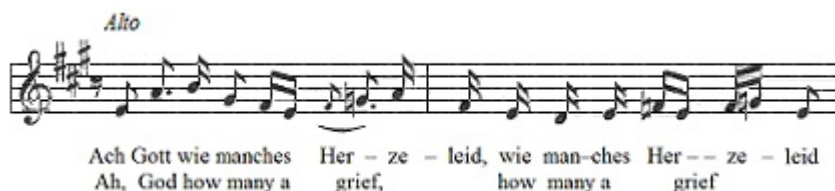
von Himmel sieh derein (Ah, God, look into this from heaven), Bach revives his customary moan (2.52b). We also find a type of variation on the descending chromatic motif applied to the words that begin the first chorus of the cantata *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*: “Ah! God, how many a grief I encounter in this time!” (2.52c).



Ex. 2.52a. *Ich armer Mensch*, BWV 55/1, mm. 17–20.



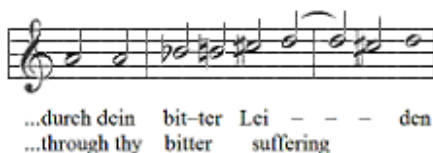
Ex. 2.52b. *Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein*, BWV 2/5, mm. 34–36.



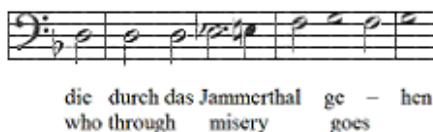
Ex. 2.52c. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*, BWV 3/1, mm. 12–13.

The cantata *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz* (Why art thou troubled, my heart?), in which Bach uses the first three verses of a poem by Hans Sachs (1494–1576), and the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele* also contain the same expressive formula. In the first cantata, it appears in the bass part at the beginning of the first chorus with the words “Why art thou troubled, my heart?” (2.53a). In the second, we find it used in the vocal accompaniment to the first verses of the chorale set to a poem by Johann Rist (1607–1669): “Jesus, thou who through thy bitter death hast forcefully torn my soul out of the devil’s dark cavern and oppressive affliction of soul” (2.53b).

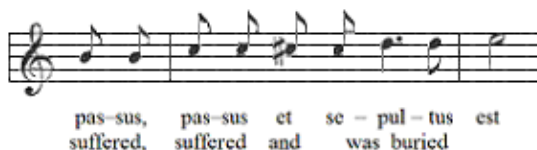
This expressive equivalence of chromatic motifs laid out in either an ascending or descending direction is used often by composers of the 17th century. We see that Schütz draws upon the ascending chromatic theme when the text speaks of painful ideas, for example when responding to the memory of the passion of Christ (ex. 2.55a), or when referring to “the valley of tears” (2.55b). Scherer proceeds in the same vein, and, while building up the “passus” (suffered) that I cited above on the descending chromatic motif, he also repeats the ascending motif there—if not in its entirety, at least in quite a distinct manner that shows he accords it the same significance as the descending motif (2.55c).



Ex. 2.55a. Heinrich Schütz, *Sämtliche Werke*, SWV 295, mm. 3–5.



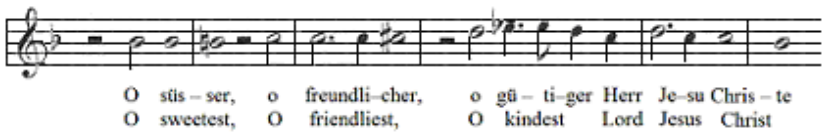
Ex. 2.55b. Heinrich Schütz, *Sämtliche Werke*, SWV 029, mm. 50–53.



2.55c. Sebastian Scherer, “Credo/Passus,” *Missae, Psalmi, et Motteti a 3, 4, 5 Vocibus cum Instrumentis/Mass I*, mm. 20–21.

Although composers of the 17th century often use the ascending chromatic motif as a reflection of the opposite, descending theme without attributing a different meaning to it, and then readily combine the two patterns with the same text according to the ready rules of counterpoint, we must avoid believing that the acceptance of the practice was general and complete. In spite of these recurring confusions, and no matter how frequent this ambiguity, the ascending motif nevertheless possesses its own inherent character just because of its direction. The masters of the period never easily sacrifice the symbolism offered by the direction of musical lines oriented toward the summits or drawn toward the depths. Beneath the surface of a shared sadness, each formula thus preserves a

definite quality. To recognize more easily the working of the imagery and the unsophisticated setting up of meanings and correspondences in this language full of allusions, it would be helpful to draw upon the styles of symbolic painters and fiction writers whose ingenuity flourished in the same era in both art and letters. We would readily compare these two chromatic themes to two afflicted allegorical characters clothed in the same veils of morning and bruised by the same pains. But one of them, overwhelmed, bends toward the grave, while the other obstinately raises her gaze toward heaven. The first gives way under the burden of bitterness—abandoned, never again to rise. The second has not despaired: she still resists and has not renounced life. In this way, one of the two chromatic themes proclaims most distinctly the defeat of the soul crushed by suffering, while the other represents to us, rather, the awakening of the soul roused by suffering. Its passionate prayer and the thwarted ardor of its desires is shown in the mounting harshness of the vocal line that is slowly exalted, as if by an effort of supplication. And we can see that Heinrich Schütz already associates such chromatic progressions with bitter pleas and desperate litanies in this manner at the beginning of this invocation filled with tenderness: “O gentle, O loving, O good Lord Jesus Christ” (2.56a). He selects a melodic line of the same character in the same sacred chorus *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus* (In the same way that the stag [is drawn unto the sources of water]) to use with the words “Ita desiderat ad te anima mea” (So is my soul drawn unto you, God) (2.56b).

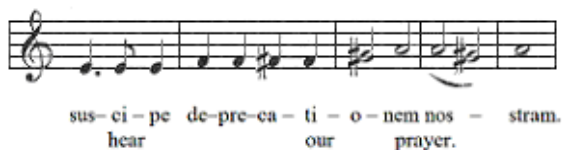


Ex. 2.56a. Heinrich Schütz, *O süsßer freundlicher*, SWV 285, mm. 1–6.

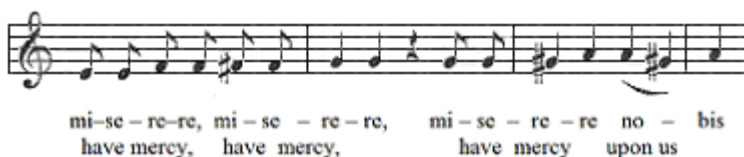


Ex. 2.56b. Heinrich Schütz, *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus*, SWV 336, mm. 10–14.

In the third mass from Andreas Hammerschmidt's collection published in 1668, an ascending chromatic motif is joined to the words "Suscipe deprecationem nostrum" (Hear our prayer) (2.57a). And in the tenth mass, the same theme, more rigorously fashioned, is sung on the words "Miserere nobis" (Have mercy upon us) (2.57b).

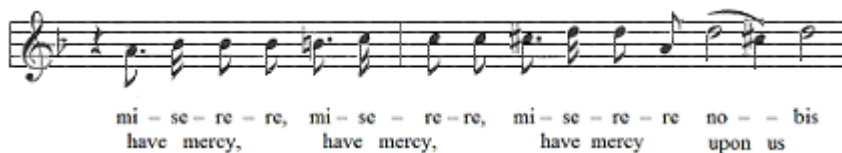


Ex. 2.57a. Andreas Hammerschmidt, "Qui tollis," *Mass III*, Canto 1 part book, folio 10 verso, 5th system.



Ex. 2.57b. Andreas Hammerschmidt, "Qui tollis," *Mass X*, Altus part book, p. 62, systems 5 and 6.

Then, Samuel Bockshorn ("Capricornus") forms the "miserere nobis" similarly in the "Agnus" of the first mass of his *Opus aureum*, published in 1670 (2.58a). And in the second part of his *Theatrum musicum*, which appeared the preceding year, he constructs a similar sequence of half-steps on the words "Sperum in Deum meum" (Hope in my God) (2.58b).



Ex. 2.58a. Samuel Bockshorn, "Agnus," *Opus aureum*/Mass I, mm. 1–3.

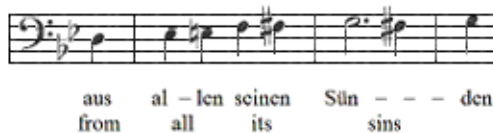


Ex. 2.58b. Samuel Bockshorn, "Spero in Deum meum," *Theatrum musicum*/Imm. 8–11.

*Ascending Chromatic Motifs and the Idea of Redemption,
of Transfiguration through Pain*


As with these composers, Bach very often recognizes a fixed value for the ascending chromatic motif. A tendency in his thinking, which we have just been able to observe, seems to show itself again here. We noted earlier that, for him, the direction of the melodic line toward the lower vocal register often agrees with the ideas of weakness, depression, collapse, the grave, and night. And, on the contrary, the melodies which reach toward high notes serve him to describe happy ideas and correspond to texts which speak of power, joy, and light. However, if he combines these fundamental ideas of his musical language with chromatic series that constantly evoke the idea of sadness, it turns out that this seemingly hard-and-fast concept nonetheless undergoes various interpretations and passes through opposing moods. So he presents us with reciprocal symbols: the motif of irremediable sorrow becomes, in its inversion, the theme of pain that will be consoled, and instead of depicting the sinking into hurt, the melody symbolizes redemption and the arduous ascent toward mercy.

The evidence of this symmetry of expression is explicit and quite abundant. When the basses in the final chorus of the cantata *Aus der Tiefen*, composed in 1707, sing that “He will redeem Israel from all its sins,” Bach expresses this idea of emancipation and purification with an ascending chromatic motif (2.59a). And in the cantata *Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende* (Praise God! Now the year comes to an end), written between 1723 and 1727 according to Spitta, he interprets the idea of remission the same way when he composes to the words: “He hath forgiven thy sin” (2.59b).



Longing and Tears

He also uses this procedure for interpreting the end of the following phrase in the cantata *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* (Blessed be Thou, Jesus Christ): “He comes to thee, to lead thee before his throne through this vale of tears” (ex. 2.60).




durch die-ses Jam - - - - mer - thal zu füh - ren
 through this vale of tears to lead
 (to lead thee through this vale of tears)

Ex. 2.60. *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*, BWV 91/4, mm. 10–12.

This last example contains an obvious amplification of an analogous passage by Schütz that accompanies the verse of a psalm in which he expresses the same idea of walking in the vale of tears with heaven as a goal.¹¹²

Bach likewise employs the stresses of Schütz and his contemporaries to speak of the troubles of the soul fallen prey to desire. Like them, he varies his lament pitch by pitch. It is rendered more heart-breaking and more urgent with each half-step. Perhaps the subconscious memory of one of their works, on which his imagination was nurtured, survives in the music he associates with the words “according to your wishes” in the alto aria from the cantata *Nimm, was dein ist* (Take what is yours), which begins “Murmur not, dear Christian, when a matter does not go according to your wishes” (ex. 2.61).

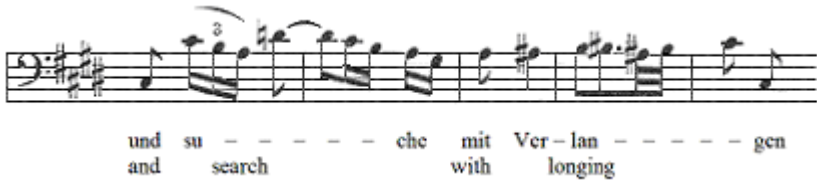


wenn was nicht nach Wunsch, nicht nach Wunsch ge - - schicht
 when a matter not according to your wish, not according to your wish goes
 (when a matter does not go according to your wishes)

Ex. 2.61. *Nimm, was dein ist*, BWV 144/2, mm. 53–56.

An ascending chromatic sequence is joined in the same way to the words “with longing” in the bass aria from the cantata *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen* (I go and search with longing for) (ex. 2.62).

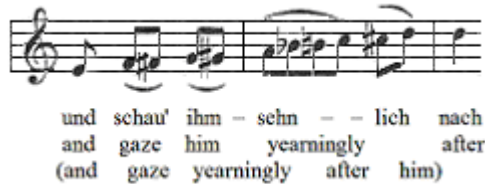
¹¹² In Psalm 84 (Schütz, *Sämtliche Werke*, 8:112).



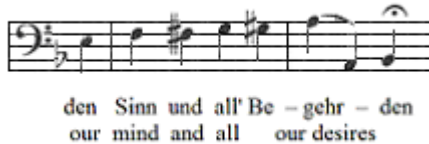
Ex. 2.62. *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen*, BWV 49/2, mm. 45–49.

This theme of impatient longing unfolds again when the alto sings “and gaze yearningly after him” in the course of an aria in the cantata *Gott fähret auf mit Jauchzen*, written, according to Spitta, for the Feast of the Ascension in 1735¹¹³ (2.63a).

And the bass part of a four-part chorale that closes the cantata *Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn* (Lord Christ, the only son of God), written between 1735 and 1744,¹¹⁴ also includes the ascending chromatic motif when the words express the soul’s will to turn all its longings and thoughts toward the Lord (2.63b).



Ex. 2.63a. *Gott fähret auf mit Jauchzen*, BWV 43/9, mm. 66–68.



Ex. 2.63b. *Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn*, 96/5, mm. 6–8.

¹¹³ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:550. [The first performance of this cantata (BWV 43) dates to 30 May 1726 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 258.—Trans.]

¹¹⁴ [The first performance of this cantata (BWV 96) dates to 8 October 1724 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 260.—Trans.]

CHAPTER THREE

THE RHYTHMIC FORMATION OF MOTIFS

Held notes. – Heavy and hindered motifs. – The rhythm of energy. – Rhythmic suppleness of the themes of welcome. – Rapid passages. – Even movements. – Interrupted movements. – Broken Declamation. – Sighing. – Imitation of nature in motifs of anguish and motifs of laughter.

Held notes

Saying that a note is high or a sound is low is to speak in terms of imagery, but saying that a motif is slow or fast is to acknowledge a fact. Of all the allusions available to composers who seek to translate ideas expressed by words into the language of music, allusions to the concept of duration are the most legitimate—at least in the sense that they are the most accurate. They, in fact, refer to a definite property of music—an art that is subject to time and is the moderator of movement.

The early masters dealt complacently with the exact interpretations allowed to them by these affinities. They even abused this exactitude, and we find examples where the literary text is transposed into music with a childish precision. For instance, in a chapter from Pedro Cerone's treatise *El Melopeo y maestro*, in which he affirms that "the imitation by the voice of the literal meaning greatly enhances the composition," he puts forward as an example a passage by Palestrina from a motet for five voices taken from the fifth book dedicated to Cardinal

Bathori—a passage in which all five voices simultaneously hold a note on the word “longa” so that it also has the value of the expression “longa”: the long syllable.¹

Bach does not use this hollow expressive trifle. The musical nomenclature that he learned in his youth would most certainly have provided him with the rudiments of such witticisms,² but he is content to observe, in a general way, the precept of which Cerone demonstrates a strict application. Bach refrains from enticing listeners by resolving literal calculations just to please the scholars. However, in repudiating all that appears childish in this procedure and that remains irrelevant to the artistic effect, he allows for the principle that authorizes the practice of natural declamation. For example, on the word “lange” (long) he writes an ample melisma interspersed with held notes and extends it over more than two measures (ex. 3.1).



Ex. 3.1. *Du Hirte Israël, höre*, BWV 104/3, mm. 12–15.

He constantly joins lengthened tones to words that evoke ideas of continuity and persistence. The meaning of the verbs “bleiben” (stay) (exs. 3.2a–d), “warten” (wait) (exs. 3.2e–g), “halten” (hold) (exs. 3.2h–j), “stehen” (stand) (exs. 3.2k–o), and “bestehen” (remain steady) (exs. 3.2p, q) are usually reflected in the vocal line, as seen in the following examples that could be easily multiplied.



Ex. 3.2a. *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, BWV 80/7, mm. 64–66.

¹ Cerone, *El Melopeo y Maestro, Tractada de Musica Theorica y pratica* (Naples: 1613), L. XII, 5:665.

² Johann Rudolff Ahle numbers the note-values from the “maxima” (longest) to the “subsemifusa” (thirty-second note) in his *Brevis et perspicua Introductio in Artem musicam* (Mülhausen: 1673).



Bleib' - - - bei uns
Abide - - - with us

Ex. 3.2b. *Bleib bei uns*, BWV 6/1, mm. 58–61.



da Bleib' - - ich
there stay - - I
(there I'll remain)

Ex. 3.2c. *Der Friede sei mit dir*, BWV 158/2, mm. 76–77.



blei - - - - - bet
stays - - - - -

Ex. 3.2d. *Liebster Immanuel, Herzog der Frommen*, BWV 123/5, mm. 58–60.



Herr, ich war - - - - te
Lord, I wait - - - -

Ex. 3.2e. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*, BWV 60/1, mm. 33–36.



Drauf wart' ich
Thereupon wait I
(I wait upon that)

Ex. 3.2f. *Was willst du dich betrüben*, BWV 107/6, mm. 21–23.

Tenor



mei-ne See-le war - - tet
my soul waits

Ex. 3.2g. *Aus der Tiefe*, BWV 131/4, mm. 4–5.

Tenor



Ich hal - - - - - te
I hold - - - - -

Ex. 3.2h. *Ich lasse dich nicht*, BWV 157/1, mm. 32–37.

Soprano



Halt' - -
Hold - -


Ex. 3.2i. *Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ*, BWV 67/1, mm. 17–19.



an dem sich meine See - le hält.
to whom my soul clings.
(to him my soul clings.)

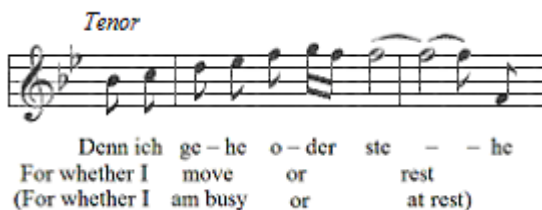
Ex. 3.2j. *Was frag ich nach der Weit*, BWV 94/2, mm. 30–33.

Tenor



So ste - - - - - het Je - sus
Then stands - - - - - Jesus
(Then Jesus stands at my side)

Ex. 3.2k. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/4, mm. 52–56.

Ex. 3.2l. *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe*, BWV 156/2, mm. 12–15.Ex. 3.2m. *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen*, BWV 49/6, mm. 132–134.Ex. 3.2n. *Man singet mit Freuden vom Sieg*, BWV 149/4, mm. 111–116.Ex. 3.2o. *Wo gehest du hin?*, BWV 166/2, mm. 30–32.Ex. 3.2p. *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen*, BWV 49/4, mm. 51–53.

Chris - ti Wort muss fest be - ste - - - hen.
 Christ's word must firm endure.
 (Christ's word must endure firmly)

Ex. 3.2q. *Wachet! betet! betet! wachet!*, BWV 70/5, mm. 24–26.

Bach also detains the singer on the adverbs “stets, beständig” (constantly) (exs. 3.3a,b), “fest” (firmly, steadily) (exs. 3.3d, e).

Tenor

stets - - - ein - her
 continually - - - along

Ex. 3.3a. *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/5, mm. 12–14.

Tenor

ganz be - stän - - - dig, ganz be - stän -
 altogether steadfast - - - , altogether steadfast -
 - - - dig, ganz be - stän - - - dig
 - - - , altogether steadfast

Ex. 3.3b. *Gott ist mein König*, BWV 71/7, mm. 90–95.

Tenor

steif und fe - - - ste
 unbendingly and firmly

Ex. 3.3c. *Was willst du dich betrüben*, BWV 107/6, mm. 33–34.

Tenor

fest — und un — be — weg — — — lich
firm and immutably (resplendent)

Ex. 3.3d. *Ich hab in Gottes Herz und Sinn*, BWV 92/3, mm. 19–21.

He associates this same musical image with the idea of faith that remains unwavering (exs. 3.4a–d).

Tenor

ich glau — — — be
I believe — — —

Ex. 3.4a. *Es ist euch gut, das ich hingehe*, BWV 108/2, mm. 41–45.

Tenor

so glaub' — — — — — — — — — — ich, Herr
so believe — — — — — — — — — — I, Lord
(but I believe, O Lord)

Ex. 3.4b. *Wer mich liebet, der wird mein Wort halten II*, BWV 74/5, mm. 42–46.

Soprano

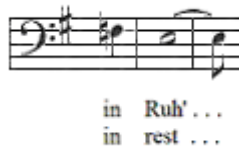
Wer da glau — — — bet
Whoever believes

Ex. 3.4c. *Wer da glaubet und getauft wird*, BWV 37/1, mm. 40–44.



Ex. 3.4d. *Wer da glaubet und getauft wird*, BWV 37/5, mm. 36–38.

He also prolongs words that express repose. For instance, “die Ruhe” (the repose) (ex. 3.5a), “der Friede” (the peace) (ex. 3.5b), “schlafen” (to sleep) (ex. 3.5c), are sung on held notes.



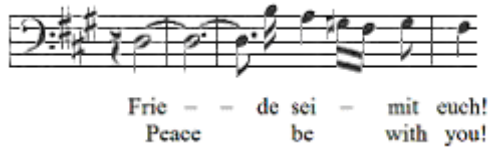
Ex. 3.5a. *Der Friede sei mit dir*, BWV 158/2, mm. 49–51.



Ex. 3.5b. *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben*, BWV 8/2, mm. 69–72.



Ex. 3.5c. *Schau, lieber Gott*, BWV 153/6, mm. 22–24.

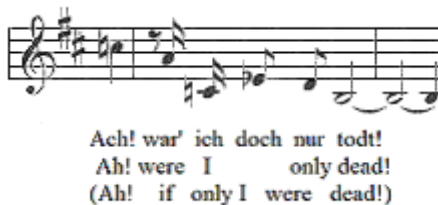


Ex. 3.5d. *Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ*, BWV 67/6, mm. 66–69.



Ex. 3.5e *Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen*, BWV 81/1, mm. 10–13.

Martin Luther portrays death as sleep in his hymn *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin* (With peace and joy I depart thither). We could say that the same comparison reappears in Bach's melodies. When texts speak to him of the grave's infinite repose, they seem to become drowsy, lingering in broad vocal expansions. If he wants to translate the words: "Ah! Were I only dead," he ends the musical phrase that accompanies them with a lengthily resounding somber note (ex. 3.6a). And when he wants to paint the long peace of death's sleep, he complacently unfurls a slow melisma with a rocking rhythm and follows it with a held note of considerable duration (ex. 3.6b).



Ex. 3.6a. *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz?*, BWV 138/1, mm. 40–42.

nach ei - nem sanften To - - -
after a gentle sleep-of-death

- - - des - - - schla - - - - - fe

Ex. 3.6b. *Du Hirte Israël, höre*, BWV 104/5, mm. 45–46.

Lastly, Bach makes a practice of holding the singer on the accentuated syllable of words that express the idea of eternity (exs. 3.7a–d).

Tenor

E - - - wig - keit
Eternity - - -

Ex. 3.7a. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! I*, BWV 20/3, mm. 13–15.³

und e - - - - -
and everlasting - - - - -

- - - - - wi - ge Treu
- - - - - faithfulness

Ex. 3.7b. *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen*, BWV 66/3, mm. 40–50.

³ Cf. the musical interpretation of the word “ewig” in the same cantata (BWV 20/2, m. 3).



Ex. 3.7c. *Es ist euch gut, das ich hingehe*, BWV 108/5, mm. 41–43.

Alto

in der rei - chen E - - - - -
in that abundant eternity - - - - -

- - - - - wigkeit

Ex. 3.7d. *Barmherziges Herze der ewigen Liebe*, BWV 185/3, mm. 21–23.

It is unnecessary to augment the number of these citations taken from works belonging to every period of Bach's life;⁴ however, it is also fitting to recall that, from several indications, the use of sustained notes to accompany words that express ideas of prolonged duration was a frequent practice in the 17th century. For example, Johann Wolfgang Franck, in the opera *Diocletian* (1862), has the singer remain indefinitely on the word "beständig" (constant, lasting),⁵ and, in another work, he places a fermata over the word "Ewigkeit" (eternity).⁶ Johann Christoph Kridel, in his *Neu-eröffnetes Blumen-Gärtlein* (Newly opened little flower garden), published in 1706, holds up on the word "beständig";⁷ and Johann Hugo Wilderer lets the voice stretch out on the imperative "dormi" (sleep)⁸ in a kind of lullaby

⁴ The same procedure serves Bach for expressing the words "harren" and "hoffen" (to hope), in the cantatas BWV 21/6, mm. 29–32 (second chorus), BWV 131/3, mm. 17–27 (second chorus), and BWV 104/5, mm. 34–36 (bass aria); the word "verlangen" (desire, longing) in the second soprano aria from the cantata *Selig ist der Mann* (BWV 57/7, mm. 88–92); and in Phoebus's first aria in *Der Streit zwischen Phöbus und Pan* (BWV 201/5, mm. 34–36, 44–55, 64–70).

⁵ In the soprano aria "Süssete Hoffnung."

⁶ Johann Franck, *Arien aus den beyden Opern von dem erhöhten und bestürzten Cara Mustapha* (Hamburg: 1687), no. 26.

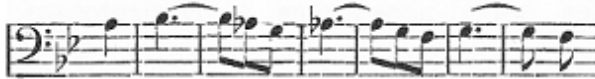
⁷ See the first aria.

⁸ Wilderer, *Modulationi sacre a due, tre e Quattro Voce e Violini* (Amsterdam: no date).



ver - bin - - - - de!
unite! - - - - -

Ex. 3.8b. *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, BWV 80/3, mm. 15–16.



ge - bun - - - - - den
does bind - - - - -

Ex. 3.8c. *Ich habe genug*, BWV 82/5, mm. 95–101.¹²

A similar rhythmic hesitation characterizes the motifs in which Bach wants to depict the dejection of the soul possessed by restlessness. We have a well-developed example of this interpretation of obsessed strife in the first version of *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I* at the beginning of the duet for soprano and alto “When cares press upon me” (Ex. 3.9).



Wenn sor - - - - - gen auf mich drin -
When cares - - - - - upon me press -



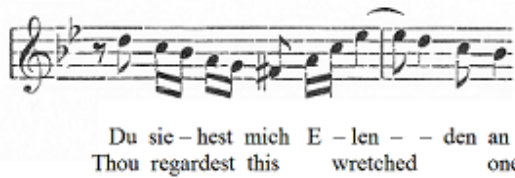
- - - - - gen

Ex. 3.9. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*, BWV 3/5, mm. 11–16.

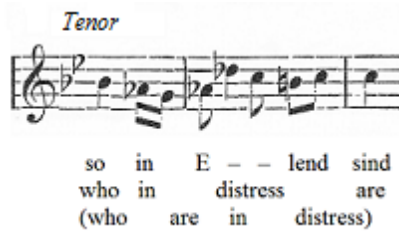
By extension, Bach adapts a similarly configured formula to words that express misery or distress. We find it in the second part of the soprano aria from

¹² We can compare the motifs cited here to the motifs joined to the word “Kette” (chain) in the cantata *Tue Rechnung!* (BWV 168/5, mm. 6–14) and in the cantata *Aus tiefer Not* (BWV 38/5, mm. 12–19).

the cantata *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren* juxtaposed to the words “Thou regardest this wretched one” (ex. 3.10a) just as in the cantata *Brich dem Hungrigen dein Brot* (Break your bread with the hungry) on the word “Elend” (distress) (ex. 3.10b).



Ex. 3.10a. *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren*, BWV 10/2, mm. 61–62.

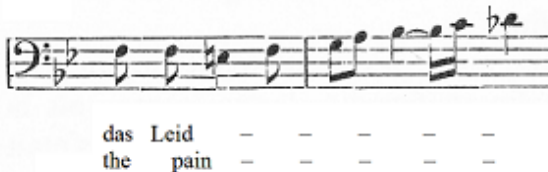


Ex. 3.10b. *Brich dem Hungrigen dein Brot*, BWV 39/1, mm. 59–61.

The motifs set to the words “unerträglich” (unbearable) (ex. 3.11a) and “Leid” (pain) (ex. 3.11b) belong, from the rhythmic point of view, to the same category as the preceding motifs.

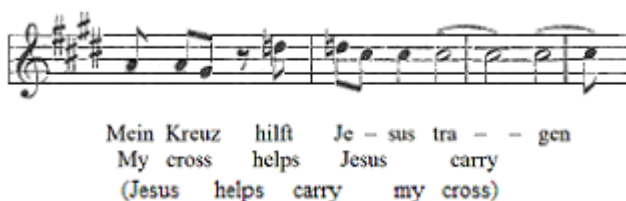


Ex. 3.11a. *Schauet doch und sehet*, BWV 46/3, mm. 55–58.



Ex. 3.11b. *Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem*, BWV 159/4, mm. 11–12.

The themes that relate to words evoking the idea of the heavy stride of a man laden with a burden are laid out in an analogous way. Made heavy by sustained notes, they therefore proceed only by slow steps like a series of broken-up efforts. The oppressiveness of the prolonged notes is mingled with the breathlessness of notes grouped in twos that trudge along timidly, lingering at the returns and the repeats. The music in the following phrases presents us with every facet of this process: “Jesus helps carry my cross” (ex. 3.12a); “I will gladly carry the crosier” (ex. 3.12b):



Ex. 3.12a. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*, BWV 3/5, mm. 50–53.

Ich will den Kreuz-stab ger - - ne tra - - -
 I will the crosier gladly carry - - -

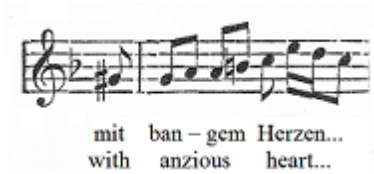
- - - - -
 - - - - - gen

Ex. 3.12b. *Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen*, BWV56/1, mm. 17–27.

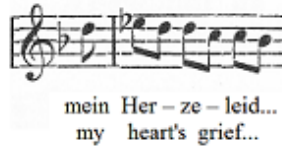
In this last example, the repeated notes have a great, meaningful importance. Bach gives this motif not only an encumbered appearance but also an impression of distress being relieved over and over again. The pace of this melisma contains something uncertain and groping that resembles the faltering of an invalid passing along the dark turnings of an unfamiliar staircase. It evokes weakness and

anxiety, and, as it drags on step by step, it seems molded out of a perpetual weariness.

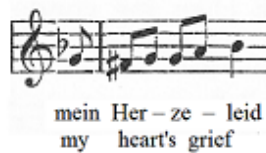
Bach frequently expresses painful feelings with themes of this type of languishing uniformity, where the melodic line dies down, then resumes from the point where it had stopped and proceeds with a new effort that is soon broken off again. In the cantata *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*, he uses this pattern to accompany the words “with anxious heart” (ex. 3.13a) and “my heart’s grief” (ex. 3.13b, c). In an example I cited earlier, the word “Traurigkeit” (sadness) is sung on the same rhythmic motif.¹³



Ex. 3.13a. *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*, BWV 146/5, mm. 31–32.



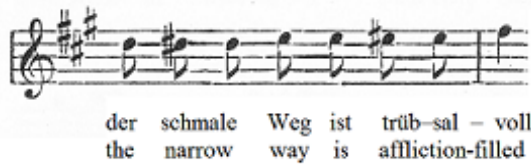
Ex. 3.13b. *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*, BWV 146/5, mm. 48–49.



Ex. 3.13c. *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*, BWV 146/5, mm. 67–68.

The same figure is used for accompanying the words “The narrow way is affliction-filled” (ex. 3.14a) and “Upon the paths of sin” (ex. 3.14b).

¹³ See ex. 2.46a (BWV 72/1, mm. 33–34).



Ex. 3.14a. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*, BWV 3/1, mm. 39–40.

Tenor

Dass wir nicht auf den Sünden - we - gen gehen, auf den
That we would not upon the paths-of-sin go, upon the
(That we would not walk upon the paths of sin)

Sün - den - we - - - gen geh - en
paths-of-sin - - - go

Ex. 3.14b. *Bleib bei uns*, BWV 6/5, mm. 13–16.

The Rhythm of Energy

If, in a grouping formed out of two notes, the second is of a lesser value than the first, this type of rhythmic pattern corresponds to ideas of power and grandeur. The melodic line moves along majestically, striding with a magnificent regularity whose progression appears to defy all resistance. In a series of shocks and vigorous rebounds, the play of an ever-renewed energy proceeds tirelessly. In this rhythm, when it is continuous, there is something of an exhibition of power, as in the stiffly straight movements and exaggerated vigor of troops on parade trying to show their courage and fortitude. We find in it a slightly taut solemnity in it at the same time that we find an intense manifestation of will. Using this configuration, Bach gives a determined, rhythmic cadence to the proud declaration “So I walk with emboldened steps, even if God leads me to the grave” (ex. 3.15).

Tenor

So geh' ich mit be-herzten Schrit - ten, mit be - herz - - ten Schrit - ten
 So walk I with emboldened steps, with emboldened - - steps
 (Thus I walk with emboldened steps, with emboldened steps)

Ex. 3.15. *Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit*, BWV 111/4, mm. 24–28.

The same resolute character rules over the motif associated with the first words of the phrase “Yet the path to blessedness leads to joy after sorrow” (ex. 3.16).

Doch der Gang - - - - - zur Se - lig - keit
 Yet the path - - - - - to blessedness

Ex. 3.16. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid II*, BWV 58/1, mm. 65–70.

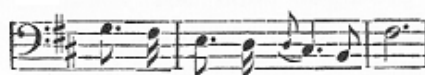
We see this inflexible rhythm again for proclaiming that almighty God will make us invincible (ex. 3.17).

Tenor

Der star - ke Gott wird uns un - il - ber - wind - lich ma - chen
 The mighty God will us unconquerable make
 (The mighty God will make us unconquerable)

Ex. 3.17. *Ich hab in Gottes Herz und Sinn*, BWV 92/3, mm. 42–43.

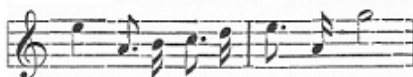
In the same way, confidence in divine aid invigorates the melodic line sung on the words “Take me continually into thy keeping and watch!” (ex. 3.18a), and this stately formula is laid out superbly when the text evokes the majesty of the Lord, for whom “the earth’s circle is too small, whom neither world nor heaven can contain” (ex. 3.18b).



Nimm mich stets in Hut und Wacht!
Take me continually into thy keeping and watch!

Ex. 3.18a. *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele II*, BWV 69/5, mm. 10–14.

Tenor



Gott, dem du Er-den - kres zu klein
God, for whom the earth's circle is too small

Ex. 3.18b. *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*, BWV 91/3, mm. 9–10.

The assurance of the soul that abandons itself to God is expressed by a theme composed on a similar rhythm (ex. 3.19).



Wirf, mein Her - ze, wirf dich noch in des Höchsten Lie - bes
Cast, O my heart, cast thyself yet into the Most-High's arms-of-love



ar - me, wirf, mein Her - ze, wirf dich noch, etc.
— —, cast, O my heart, cast thyself yet, etc.

Ex. 3.19. *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange*, BWV 155/4, mm. 9–12.

In the cantata *Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke* (I am content with my fortune), Bach allows himself the same resource for depicting the smiling and active patience of the soul that gladly welcomes life as it presents itself to him (ex. 3.20).



Ich bin ver - gnugt, ich bin vergnugt mit mei — — nem Glü - cke
I am content, I am content with my lot

Ex. 3.20. *Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke*, BWV 84/1, mm. 36–40.

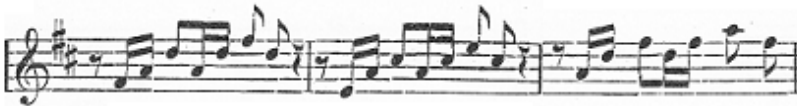
There is more suppleness in the rhythms of the motifs associated with the words from which joy blossoms out freely without a trace of effort clouding it.

When conscience is liberated from the false serenity that resignation gives to mournful hearts, the themes lighten up and leap, gladdened and full of soaring. They no longer have this exact and severely disciplined rhythmic cadence whose solemn rigidity is, on the whole, rather inhuman. Even when Bach organizes these rhythmic elements in some systematic way and even when he lavishes them with his redundant melismas, the large phrases that he gathers them into retain a lively and sincere demeanor, as if they were merely fashioned from the inexhaustible and prolific repetitions of a spontaneous lyricism. In various cantatas, this type of rhythmic figure is clearly defined in the melismas accompanying the word “jauchzen” (exult) for uttering cries of joy (exs. 3.21 a–c).



Lasst uns jauch — — zen
Let us exult

Ex. 3.21a. *Herr Gott, dich loben wir*, BWV 16/3, mm. 1–2.



Jauch — — zet, jauch — — zet, jauch — — — zet
Shout with joy, shout with joy, shout with joy

Ex. 3.21b. *Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille*, BWV 120/2, mm. 15–17.



mit Jauch — — — — —
with exultation — — — — —



— — — — — zen

Ex. 3.21c. *Geist und Seele wird verwirret*, BWV 35/2, mm. 65–68.


The figure appears again in jubilant melismas coupled to the words “How I will rejoice” (ex. 3.22a) and “A veritable heaven of joy [must constantly be in my heart]” (ex. 3.22b).

Tenor



Wie will ich mich freu - - - - en
How I will rejoice - - - -

Ex. 3.22a. *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*, BWV 146/7, mm. 21–24.



Freu - - - - -
Heaven-of-joy - - - - -

- - - - - den - him - mel

Ex. 3.22b. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*, BWV 3/3, mm. 23–27.

The same bounding movement gives impulsion to the forward flight of the great outburst that unfurls on the word “Freude” (joy) in the first bass recitative of the cantata *Wachet! betet!* (ex. 3.23a). The word “erfreulich” (gratifying), in the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, is cadenced rhythmically in the same manner (ex. 3.23b).

Freu
Joy

de

Ex. 3.23a. *Wachet! betet! betet! wachet!*, BWV 70/2, mm. 10–13.

er - freu
pleasing

lich

Ex. 3.23b. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/2, mm. 96–97.

A similar coupling of short notes and the same momentum is found again in passages where Bach wants to illustrate feelings of consolation, benediction, or the return of happiness: “Recover yourselves (ex. 3.24a); “he blesses” (ex. 3.24b); “Now my heart enjoys itself” (ex. 3.24c).

Tenor

Er - ho
Recover

let euch,
yourselves,

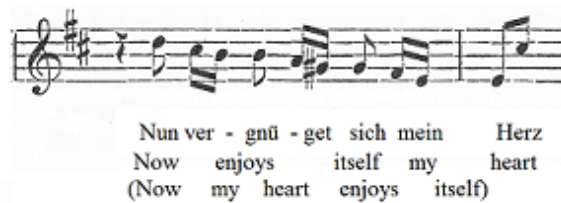
er - ho
recover

let euch
yourselves

Ex. 3.24a. *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen*, BWV 103/5, mm. 7–9.



Ex. 3.24b. *Der Herr denkt an uns*, BWV/2, mm. 4–5.

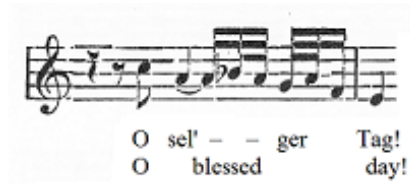


Ex. 3.24c. *Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen*, BWV 32/5, mm. 53–54.¹⁴

Rhythmic Suppleness of the Themes of Welcome

Bach readily combines a rhythmic motif ending in quickened notes with words that awaken an idea of smiling blissfulness, welcome, congratulation, and tenderness; he writes it to interpret exclamations that seem to burst forth from an opened heart: “O blessed day!” (ex.3.25a); “blissful city” (ex. 3.25b); “beloved people” (ex. 3.25c); “O blessed is he who sees Jesus in the Scripture” (ex. 3.25d); “How blessed are we!” (ex. 3.25e); “It is well for thee” (ex. 3.25f); “dearest Jesus” (exs. 3.25g–i); “Thou sweet name of Jesus” (ex. 3.25j); “and pronounce a blessing upon them” (ex. 3.25k); “a light of joy” (ex. 3.25l); “His light of grace” (ex. 3.25m); “Thou, my physician” (ex. 3.25n); “a refreshment to our hearts” (ex. 3.25o).

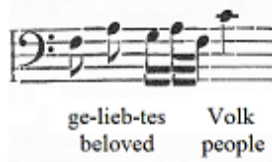
¹⁴ Bach likewise gives the same rhythm to the motif joined to the words “Thy will, my God, I do gladly” (Cantata *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen*, BWV 182/3, mm. 2–7). Let us note that this work dates back to the years 1714–15. [The first performance of this cantata was Palm Sunday, 25 March 1714 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 264.—Trans.] We may observe motifs of similar rhythmic construction, and even of intent, in the works of Michael Altenburg (1584–1640) cited by M. L. Meinecke (*Sammelbande der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*. 5:23), by J.W. Franck (ms. from the Wolfenbüttel library, folio 28b, 294), and by J. Pachelbel in his motet for two choirs *Tröste uns* (*Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Bayern*, 6th year, 1:95).



Ex. 3.25a. *Christen, ätzt diesen Tag*, BWV 63/2, mm. 1–2.



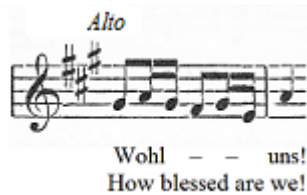
Ex. 3.25b. *Preise Jerusalem, den Herrn*, BWV 119/2, mm. 1–2.



Ex. 3.25c. *Preise, Jerusalem, den Herrn*, BWV 119/4, m. 18.¹⁵

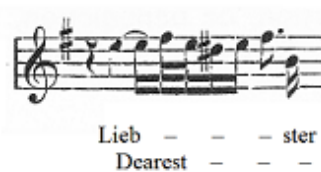
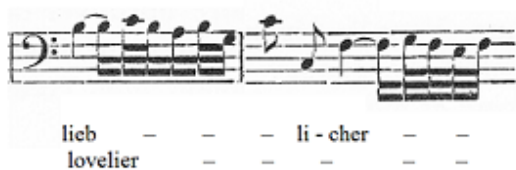


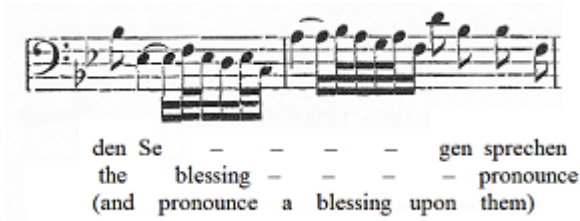
Ex. 3.25d. *Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht*, BWV 186/4, m. 11.



Ex. 3.25e. *Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ*, BWV 67/6, mm. 25–26.

¹⁵ Cantata for the election of the Leipzig council. This work was performed in 1722. [The performance date of this cantata is 30 August 1723 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 261.—Trans.]

Ex. 3.25f. *Preise, Jerusalem, den Herrn*, BWV 119/3, mm. 12–13.Ex. 3.25g. *Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen*, BWV 32/1, m. 9.Ex. 3.25h. *Wer mich liebet, der wird mein Wort halten I*,
BWV 59/1, mm. 20–21.Ex. 3.25i. *Mein Gott, wie lang', ach lange?*, BWV 155/3, mm. 18–19.Ex. 3.25j. *Gott, wie dein Name*, BWV 171/3, mm. 1–2.



den Se - - - gen sprechen
the blessing - - - pronounce
(and pronounce a blessing upon them)

Ex. 3.25k. *Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht*, BWV 186/7, mm. 17–18.



ein Freu - - - denschein
a light-of-joy

Ex. 3.25l. *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*, BWV 1/4, m. 3.



sein Gna - den - licht
his light-of-grace

Ex. 3.25m. *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange?*, BWV 155/3, mm. 17–18.



Du, mein Arzt
Thou, my physician

Ex. 3.25n. *Es ist nichts Gesundes an meinem Leibe*, BWV 25/3, m. 26.



Labsal
refreshment

Ex. 3.25o. *Erfreute Zeit im neuen Bunde*, BWV 83/2, m. 45.

These short formulas have a delightful graciousness—the glow of a welcoming gesture, both supple and eager. They unfurl themselves with ease and soon vanish. Their grace seems entirely spontaneous, for they are never repeated, or hardly ever. The slightest insistence would weigh them down and falsify them, and Bach has left them with the naturalness of the first subconscious movement we make when meeting a friend, and which we would not know how to reproduce without appearing constrained and our cordiality being feigned.

Rapid Passages

On the other hand, continuity and abundance characterize the rhythms with which Bach wishes to show the vigorous perseverance of freely prolonged endeavors, the state of joy, and rapid movements that follow each other without interruption. Perhaps the idea of an orderly and fast foot race or an unhampered current is, in fact, at the root of all these musical metaphors. On the whole, we find the counterpart here of the earlier primitive parallel that allows for the representation of ideas of resistance and opposition through motifs with disturbed and broken rhythms. Bach uses this imitative process in the most varied manner, according to the circumstances in which he applies it. If he merely wants to depict the action of walking, he is content to organize a series of notes of an even and moderate speed. We have examples of it in the passages in which he sets these phrases to music: “Let us now go to Bethlehem” (ex. 3.26a); “So let us enter that Salem of joy” (Ex. 3.26b); “I follow after Christ” (ex. 3.26c); “They went forth unto the Mount of Olives” (ex. 3.26d); “We come” (ex. 3.26e).



Ex. 3.26a. *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/II/26, mm. 1–2.



Ex. 3.26b. *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen*, BWV 182/8, mm. 24–26.



ich folge Christo nach
 I follow Christ after
 (I follow after Christ)

Ex. 3.26c. *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*, BWV 12/5, mm. 5–6.

Tenor



gingen sin hinaus an den Oelberg
 they went forth to the Mount of Olives

Ex. 3.26d. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/I/20, m. 3.

Soprano



Wir kom - - - men
 We come - - -

Ex. 3.26e. *Dem Gerechten muss das Licht*, BWV 195, mm. 21–22.

It is almost superfluous to restate here that some images of this kind are extremely common in the works of musicians who preceded Bach. I gave some excerpts earlier from Sebastiani and Johann Theile that could be cited again here, and in Schütz's compositions the same descriptions are frequent. He joins a huge, hastening melisma to the word "fahren" (go) (ex. 3.27a). Carissimi writes some equal, rapid notes on the word "eamus" (let us go) (ex. 3.27b), and Johann Wolfgang Franck expresses the word "Lauf" (run) in the same way (ex. 3.27c).



Ex. 3.27a. Heinrich Schütz, *Symphoniae sacrae II*, SWV 352, mm. 7–8.¹⁶



Ex. 3.27b. Giacomo Carissimi, *Historia dei pellerini di Emmaus*, 11, mm. 7–8.¹⁷



Ex. 3.27c. Johann Wolfgang Franck, *Aeneas' Ankunft in Italien*, aria 1, mm. 34–35.

Bach embraces this tradition and perpetuates it tirelessly. He persistently accompanies the verb “eilen” (hasten) with large melismas that swiftly unroll (exs. 3.28a–g).



Ex. 3.28a. *Wer mich liebet, der wird mein Wort halten II*, BWV 74/5, mm. 13–15.

¹⁶ See also no. 21 of *Symphoniae sacrae*, pt. 2.

¹⁷ In Carissimi's *Histoire des Pèlerins d'Emmaüs*, published by H. Quittard in *Concerts spirituels* edited by the *Schola Cantorum* (book 1: 13).



ei - - - - - le
hasten - - - - -

This musical example shows a single staff in bass clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a final quarter note. The lyrics 'ei' and 'hasten' are aligned with the first two measures, and 'le' is aligned with the final measure.

Ex. 3.28b. *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen*, BWV 49/3, mm. 35–38.

Tenor



Ich ei - - - - - le
I hasten - - - - -

This musical example shows a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a final quarter note. The lyrics 'Ich' and 'I' are aligned with the first measure, 'ei' and 'hasten' with the second measure, and 'le' with the final measure.


Ex. 3.28c. *Bringet dem Herrn Ehre seinen Namens*, BWV 148/2, mm. 20–22.



Eilt - - - - -
Hasten - - - - -

This musical example shows a single staff in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a final quarter note. The lyrics 'Eilt' and 'Hasten' are aligned with the first two measures.

Ex. 3.28d. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/II/24, mm. 17–19.



Phöbus eilt - - - - -
Phoebus hastens - - - - -

This musical example shows a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a final quarter note. The lyrics 'Phöbus' and 'Phoebus' are aligned with the first measure, 'eilt' and 'hastens' with the second measure.

Ex. 3.28e. *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten*, BWV 202/3, mm. 5–6.

eilt, eilt, - - - eilt, eilt
hasten, hasten, - - - hasten, hasten

- - - - -

Ex. 3.28f. *Denn du wirst meine Seele nicht in der Hölle lassen*,
BWV 15/6, mm. 41–44.¹⁸

Nun will ich ei - - - - -
Now would I hasten - - - - -

- - - - - len

Ex. 3.28g. *Sehet, wir gehn hinauf nach Jerusalem*, BWV 159/4, mm. 42–45.¹⁹

He associates the same fleeting melismas with the words “schnell” (fast), “laufen, Lauf” (run, course) (exs. 3.29 a–d).

¹⁸ Spitta considers this cantata as having been composed for Easter festivities in 1764, then recast later (Spitta, *J.S. Bach*, 1:227). [This cantata was composed by Johann Ludwig Bach according to Unger, *Handbook*, 51.—Trans.]


¹⁹ Similar illustrations of the same word are also found in the cantata *Du Hirte Israë!, höre* (BWV 104/3, mm. 56–57) and in the cantata *Erfreute Zeit im neuen Bunde* (BWV 83/3, mm. 9–11, 20–24).

Tenor



So schnell — — — — —
As fast as — — — — —

Ex. 3.29a. *Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig*, BWV 26/2, mm. 12–14.



lau — — — — fen
run — — — —

Ex. 3.29b. *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland II*, BWV 62/3, mm. 5–6.



Lauf — — — — —
(my) course — — — — —

Ex. 3.29c. *Wachet! betet! betet! wachet!*, BWV 70/9, mm. 28–29.



lau — — — — — fen
run — — — — —

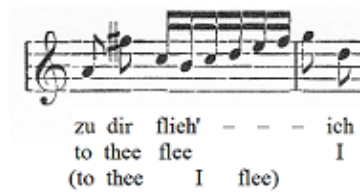
Ex. 3.29d. *Jesus nahm zu sich die Zwölfe*, BWV 22/3, mm. 2–3.

Flight and quick disappearance are generally represented by fluid and agile motifs (exs. 3.30a–d).

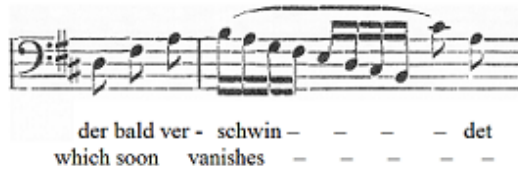


flie — — — — — — — — — hen
flee — — — — — — — — —

Ex. 3.30a. *Wachet! betet! betet! wachet!*, BWV 70/3, mm. 34–35.



Ex. 3.30b. *Es ist nichts Gesundes an meinem Leibe*, BWV 25/4, mm. 2–3.



Ex. 3.30c. *Was frag ich nach der Welt*, BWV 94/2, mm. 13–14.



Ex. 3.30d. *Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen*, BWV 56/3, mm. 22–26.²⁰

Bach also accompanies the word “wanken” (stagger) with a hastening line as if he wishes to portray the stirring confusion of dizziness by making the melody swirl (ex. 3.31a). Erlebach uses this procedure at the beginning of the aria “I hold myself steady and never waver” (ex. 3.31b).

²⁰ Compare with the same word in the tenor aria from the cantata *Bisher habt ihr nichts gebeten in meinem Namen* (BWV 87/6, m. 24).

Tenor

Wie wan - - - - - ket
How wavers - - - - -

Ex. 3.31a. *Ich glaube, lieber Herr*, BWV 109/3, mm. 9–10.

und wan - - - - - ke und wan-ke nicht
and stagger - - - - - and never waver

Ex. 3.31b. *Erlebach, Harmonische Freude musicalischer Freunde/I/VI*, mm. 3–4.

Bach interprets the word “zerstreuen” (scatter) with the same disturbed agitation (ex. 3.32).

Tenor

zer - - streu'n
scatter - - - - -

Ex. 3.32. *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren*, BWV 10/3, mm. 13–15.

On the other hand, he gives words that express power a musical adornment both violent and rhythmically straightforward, as in the beginning of the aria “Yea, Yea, I can defeat thine enemies” (ex. 3.33a). We find this type of melisma over and over again, but we should also note one here, among others, that Bach writes on the word “walten” (rule) in the bass aria from the cantata *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz?* (ex. 3.33b).

schla - - - - - gen
defeat - - - - -

Ex. 3.33a. *Selig ist der Mann*, BWV 57/5, mm. 14–16.

ten

Ex. 3.33b. *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz*, BWV 138/5, mm. 32–36.

The combination of different note values gives an irregular cadence to the beginning of the motif joined to the word “geisseln” (scourge), then the rhythm slackens toward the end as if Bach wants us to hear how the executioner’s arm tires from smiting (ex. 3.34a). We should also note here that J.W. Franck uses the same jerky rhythm in a melisma formed around the participle “geschlagen” (was defeated) (ex. 3.34b).

[illegible]

Ex. 3.34a. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/II/18c, mm. 7–9.



Ex. 3.34b. Johann Franck, *Aeneas' Ankunft in Italien*, aria 3, mm. 1–2.

Even Movements

Themes of joy are amply developed in a sprightly and even movement without bumps or haste, but this is not Bach's most frequent rhythmic interpretation or the most constant. Nor did he establish the standard. Heinrich Schütz makes use of it too, but he brings nothing new to it beyond merely endowing his unaccompanied vocal works with one of polyphony's resources that abounds in long, jubilant melismas. There is no need here for us to go back to other works of the 16th century because we can remain with Schütz—the creator of the German recitative—and point out the broad arabesque that he lays out for “sich freuen” (to rejoice) in the little sacred concert *Ich will den Herren loben allezeit* (I will praise the Lord all the time).²¹ We also find this motif in Bach's earliest works, as with the majority of his descriptive motifs inherited from the past. The cantata for the election of the council of the imperial free city of Mühlhausen (4 February 1708)²² provides proof of it in its final chorale (ex. 3.35a). This rhythmic formula appears as well in the cantatas *Nach dir, Herr, velanget mich* (ex. 3.35b), *Ach! ich sehe, itzt, da ich zur Hochzeit gehe* (Ah! I see, now that I go to the heavenly wedding) (ex. 3.35c), and *Mein gott, wie lang, ach lange* (My God, how long, ah, how long?) (ex. 3.35d), which were probably written between 1712 and 1716.²³



Ex. 3.35a. *Gott ist mein König*, BWV 71/7, mm. 43–49.

²¹ Schütz, *Kleine geistliche Concerte* (pt. 2, no. 1). *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Spitta, vol. 6.

²² [The performance date of this cantata was 2 April 1708 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 259.—Trans.]

²³ [The performance dates for these cantatas, respectively, are BWV 71: 1708; BWV 150: ? before 1708; BWV 162: 1716; BWV 155: 1716 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 239–261.—Trans.]



Ex. 3.35b. *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich*, BWV 150/7, mm. 15–21.



Ex. 3.35c. *Ach! ich sehe, itzt, da ich zur Hochzeit gehe*, BWV 162/5, mm. 20–23.



Ex. 3.35d. *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange*, BWV 155/2, mm. 27–30.²⁴

It isn't essential here to enumerate all the cases in which Bach revives this image, but I will choose just a few more examples of brilliant character whose melismas are definitely worth pointing out. They have an enthusiastic bearing and a kind of delirious virtuosity that corresponds marvelously to the exalted feelings that they aim to portray (exs. 3.36a–g).




Ex. 3.36a. *Erfreute Zeit im neuen Bunde*, BWV 83/1, mm. 30–32.

²⁴ We can also cite the melisma on “Freude” (joy) from the tenor aria and recitative in the cantata *Ich weiss, dass mein Erlöser lebt* (BWV 160/1, mm. 49–51; 2, mm. 29–31). This work belongs to the same period as the works mentioned here, and the formula is presented in all the amplitude of its overflowing lyricism. [This cantata was composed by Georg Philipp Telemann according to Unger, *Handbook*, 553.—Trans.] We should note in passing a remarkable specimen of these repeating and returning melismas in the motet *Gott sei uns gnädig und segne uns* by Johann Ludwig Bach (1677–1724), Johann Sebastian’s cousin (Cf. Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:572).



In der Freu - - - - de
In joy - - - - -

Ex. 3.36b. *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe*, BWV 156/5, mm. 44–45.



er - freut - - - -
happy - - - - -

Ex. 3.36c. *Ich lasse dich nicht*, BWV 157/4, mm. 90–91.

Tenor



Tritt freu - - - - dig
Step joyfully - - - -

Ex. 3.36d. *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, BWV 80/6, m. 7.



Die Freu - - - - de
Joy - - - - -

Ex. 3.36e. *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele*, BWV, 180/4, 10–11.



Die Freu - - - - - - - - - - de
Joy - - - - - - - - - - -

Ex. 3.36f. *Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust*, BWV 170/3, mm. 22–24.

“silence” appears that was so easy for them to interpret. Actually, beneath its childish appearance, the procedure does not lack in poetic meaning. There is something mysterious and solemn in this vocal truce. We still listen for the voices when they are suddenly extinguished, and we are already wondering about what they are going to say when we hear them anew. It would seem then that the light has gone out and we are waiting to see it again in a night peopled with unsettling visions, reflections of faint images, or premonitions of those to come that we like to imagine. In his history of music, Ambros admiringly cites a passage taken from a motet by Costanzo Festa, who died in 1545, in which the singers stop and do not continue until they have made a long pause after the words “et tacebit” (and keepeth silence).²⁹ At the beginning of the 17th century, Gregorio Allegri revives the same expressive device on the same words.³⁰ Moreover, we must acknowledge that this stirring cessation of the singing was recognized and classified as one of the concepts to teach composers. Sethius Calvisius formally recommended it in chapter eighteen of his *Melopoeia* (1592): “In interitu aut silentio, interdum omnes voces silent” (In death or silence, sometimes all the words silent).³¹ Johann Crüger reiterates the same precept in his *Synopsis musica* (1624).³²

After the words “The wonder that my soul has experienced hath made it deaf and dumb,” Bach suspends the voice and orchestra, thus reinvigorating the simple and profound idea of masters from earlier times.³³

Broken Declamation

He also intersperses a melodic line with silences so as to render palpable the idea of liberation expressed in the text. We saw earlier how he leans heavily on the accents that thwart the pace of the singing in order to signify ideas of obstruction and bondage, but he uses the reverse process here. This logical contrast makes the unity of his thinking and the symmetry of his comparisons clear to us. We find enough examples of these sudden ruptures of the melodic line for us to be assured that he gives them a willful character. I cite a passage from the alto recitative in the cantata *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben* (Dearest God, when shall I die?) in the phrase “Who will indeed set the soul free and release it from its oppressing yoke of sin?” (ex. 3.37a). In the cantata *Gott führet auf mit Jauchzen*, we find another instance of these breaks (ex. 3.37b).

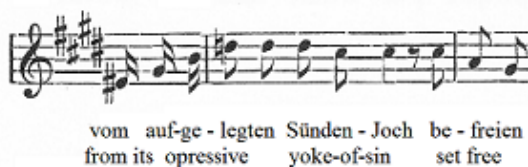
²⁹ August Wilhelm Ambros, *Geschichte der Musik*, 1862–82, vol 3 (3rd ed., 1893), 3.

³⁰ Ambros, *Geschichte der Musik*, vol. 4 (2nd ed., 1881), 92.

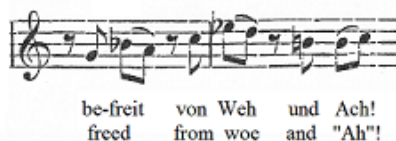
³¹ Calavisius, *Melopoeia*, chap. 18. The title of this chapter is “De Oratione sive Textu” (On prayer or text).

³² Johann Crüger, *Synopsis musica*, 182. See also the work cited by Speer, *Grundrichter, kurz-, leicht- und nöthiger* (Ulm: 1697), 282.

³³ Cantata *Geist und Seele wird verwirret* (BWV 35/3, mm. 63–72).

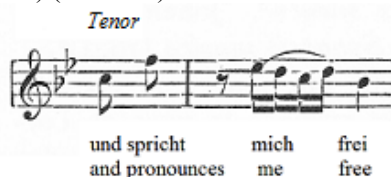


Ex. 3.37a. *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben*, BWV 8/3, mm. 4–6.



Ex. 3.37b. *Gott fährt auf mit Jauchzen*, BWV 43/10, mm. 5–6.³⁴

Bach does the same thing in the tenor aria from the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele* at the end of the phrase “The blood which strikes out my guilt . . . and pronounces me free” (ex. 3.38a). In another cantata, *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid II*, the word “brechen” (break) receives a similar interpretation (ex. 3.38b); and in the cantata *Geist und Seele wird verwirret*, the musical phrase is similarly interrupted—contrary to the general rules of declamation—between the imperative “löse” (loose) and its object “das jammerreiche smerzensjoch” (this misery-laden yoke of pain) (ex. 3.38c).



Ex. 3.38a. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/4, mm. 25–26.



Ex. 3.38b. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid II*, BWV 58/3, mm. 35–36.

³⁴ Cf. Cantata BWV 93/3, mm. 17–19 at these words “Man halte nur—ein wenig stille” (One should be just—a little quiet).

Alto

lö - - se doch das jam - mer - rei - che, etc.
loose - - please this misery-laden, etc.

Ex. 3.38c. *Geist und Seele wird verwirret*, BWV 35/7, mm. 54–57.

The words “genug” (enough)³⁵ and “nichts” (nothing) are frequently isolated from the rest of the melodic line to emphasize what is definitive in their meaning (ex. 3.39a, b).

Tenor

nichts, nichts, wird mich ver - letzen, nichts, nichts, etc.
nothing, nothing will me hurt, nothing, nothing, etc.
(Then nothing will hurt me)

Ex. 3.39a. *In allen meinen Taten*, BWV 97/4, mm. 31–33.

Nichts, nichts, nichts, nichts
Nought, nought, nought, nought

Ex. 3.39b. *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben?*, BWV 8/4, m. 42.

Franz Tunder uses the same procedure in a chorus composed on the hymn *Ein feste Burg*,³⁶ and we see it applied again by Bach in the motet *Jesu, meine Freude* (Jesus, my joy).³⁷

Sometimes Bach goes as far as dividing the words themselves. For instance, in one of his earliest cantatas, *Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir*, written in 1707, he breaks up the word “Erlösung” (deliverance) in an odd way and separates the word “Flehen” (supplication) into several segments (ex. 3.40a, b).

³⁵ Cantata *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her* (BWV 9/1, mm. 90–95). Compare with BWV 63/5, mm. 127–132.

³⁶ Tunder, *Gesangwerke*, ed. Seiffert, *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst* (1900), 3:145.

³⁷ BWV 227, mm. 1–4, 9–12.



Ex. 3.40a. *Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir*, BWV 131/5, mm. 21–23.



Ex. 3.40b. *Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir*, BWV 131/1, mm. 32–35.

The first of these examples recalls the earlier interpretation of the idea of liberation that we saw expressed by a type of dividing up of the melodic groupings from each other. It is a type of conventional allusion whose expressive value is very debatable. The second example, on the contrary, shows a tendency toward realism. In fact, Bach's purpose there is to imitate prayer broken up by sobs—the breathless supplication arising out of Psalm 130. He shows the same intent in his custom of using a silence to break up the declamation of the words “Seufzer” (sigh) and “seufzen” (to sigh). But we must not judge this process too hastily or narrowly, even though Henry Peacham, M.A. expresses outrage that Orazio Vecchi, in a work published in 1634, had aspired to interpret musically the word “sigh” by letting the silence represent the sighing.³⁸ But Peacham's criticism is ungrounded, for there is something in this musical practice beyond the mere bad play on words he takes as being a contemptible musical “conchetto” (idea). Even if it is permissible in certain cases to reprimand the expressive excess of this disjointing of words, or if it is easy to acknowledge that sometimes its effect is rather disagreeable, we must recognize, however, that by interrupting the singing of the words with brief silences, we reproduce the uneven utterance of someone oppressed by grief, whose breathing is flawed and whose speech is stifled. This fact alone is sufficient for us to see the penetrating meaning of this somewhat odd use of separating syllables. Without a doubt, Bach never had the least qualm with the idea. In fact, he has left us a great number of examples in which he shows that he has never regarded this resource unworthy of him. Moreover, it was a traditional one and was commonly used by German composers at the end of the 17th century.

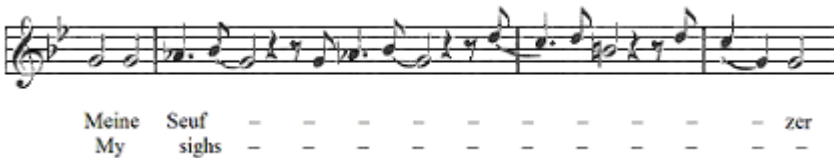
³⁸ Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (London: 1634), 100.

Sighing

For example, in his *Exaudi, Domine, clamentem*, Johann Rudolph Ahle divides the word “suspirantem” (sighing) into three fragments;³⁹ Johann Fischer likewise breaks apart the word “Seufzer” (sigh) in the *Madrigale quartum* in his collection *Himmlische Seelen-Lust* (1686) (ex. 3.41a), and Johann Philipp Erlebach accompanies the same word with a large, subdivided melisma where the sections of the melody repeat themselves as an echo (ex. 3.41b) somewhat as in the motif that Bach joins to the word “Flehen” (supplication) in the cantata *Aus der Tiefen*.⁴⁰



Ex. 3.41a. Johann Fischer, *Himmlische Seelen-Lust*, “Madrigale quartum,” mm. 49–53.



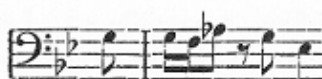
Ex. 3.41b. Johann Erlebach, *Harmonische Freude musicalischer Freunde*/I/XIV, mm. 14–18.⁴¹

It will suffice for us to choose just a few examples from Bach’s work to confirm that he merely follows his predecessors in this way of representing sighs (ex. 3.42a–d).

³⁹ *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, Series 1, 5:1.

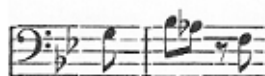
⁴⁰ See exs. 3.40a and b above.

⁴¹ *Harmonische Freude, Erster Theil*, no. 14, (1697). See also Briegel (*Musicalischer Lebens-Brunn*, 1689), no 18.



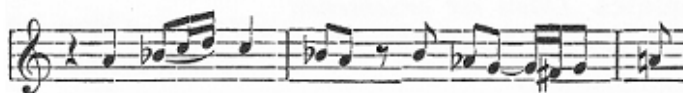
So seuf - - zest du
Then sigh you
(Then you sigh)

Ex. 3.42a. *Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht*, BWV 186/2, mm. 15–16.



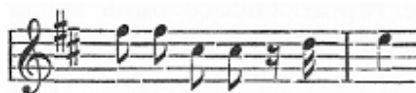
die Seuf - zer
these groans

Ex. 3.42b. *Herr, wie du willst*, BWV 73/4, mm. 15–16.



Ich bin von Seuf - - zen mü - - - de
I am from sighing weary
(I am weary with sighing)

Ex. 3.42c. *Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder*, BWV 135/4, mm. 1–3.



In-des-sen seuf - zen wir
To this sigh we
(To this we sigh)

Ex. 3.42d. *Easter Oratorio*, BWV 249/8, mm. 1–2.⁴²

⁴² See also the tenor recitatives from the cantatas *Jesu, der du meine Seele* (BWV 78/3, m. 20) and *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott* (BWV 127/2, m. 6).

*Imitation of Nature in Motifs of Anguish
and Motifs of Laughter*

We should note, however, that while accepting this procedure, Bach uses it more discretely and does not develop the motifs associated with the word “seufzen” (to sigh) in the manner of Fischer and Erlebach who seem to attempt to extend their melismas just for the sake of renewing these ingenious breaks that lend them meaning.⁴³ But Bach has less reserve when he no longer needs to murmur the muted moan of a wounded heart that barely surrenders the secret of its sorrow and he wants to burst forth with the wails of a soul torn apart, the prey of terror or despair.

In the second part of the cantata *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben* (Lord, thine eyes look for faith) he vehemently exhorts the Christian to be fearful, and the theme that he unleashes instantly shudders with terror (ex. 3.43).



Ex. 3.43. *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*, BWV 102/5, mm. 13–16.

The first chorus of the cantata *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort!* I provides us with a kindred example, sung by the voices that accompany the chorale melody on the words “My completely frightened heart quakes so much.”⁴⁴ The word “schrecklich” (frightful) is torn apart as well in the tenor aria from the cantata *Es reisset euch ein schrecklich Ende* (Now a frightful end comes upon you).⁴⁵ This process is repeated in the cantatas *Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes*,⁴⁶ *Ach, Herr, mich armen Sünder* (Ah, Lord, this poor sinner),⁴⁷ and *Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgethan III* (Whatever God does, that is done well III).⁴⁸

In a cantata undoubtedly written for the Easter celebration of 1713 or 1714, *Ich weiss, dass mein Erlöser lebt* (I know that my redeemer lives), we find

⁴³ We should note, however, that Erlebach’s intention to imitate in the phrase does no harm to the musical value of the motif, which is profoundly expressive in its repetitions as he has written it.

⁴⁴ BWV 20/1, mm. 93–97.

⁴⁵ BWV 90/1, mm. 30–32.

⁴⁶ BWV 40/7, mm. 30–32.

⁴⁷ BWV 135/2, m. 11.

⁴⁸ BWV 100/5, mm. 25–28.

some words expressing the idea of suffering that are also interpreted by broken-up motifs (ex. 3.44a,b).⁴⁹



Ex. 3.44a. *Ich weiss, dass mein Erlöser lebt*, BWV 160/1, mm. 52–55.



Ex. 3.44b. *Ich weiss, dass mein Erlöser lebt*, BWV 160/1, mm. 61–65.

Among the motifs with disjointed syllables we must cite again the melismas combined with the words “verklagen” (accuse),⁵⁰ and “schlagen” (strike).⁵¹ These interpretations of grievous and menacing ideas are related to the preceding examples.

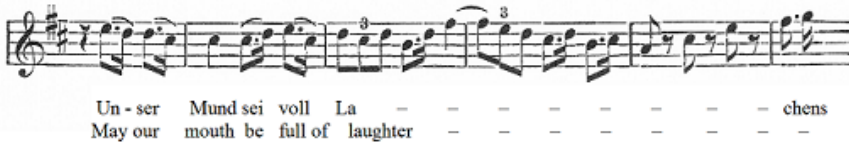
On the other hand, in certain cases this process of using detached notes is employed by Bach with an entirely different meaning to represent bursts of laughter. But we should not be astonished to see him using it in this way for depicting natural occurrences as opposite as laughing and sobbing. In fact, because of the rhythm alone, we would not be justified in considering anything other here than the mere imitation of certain phenomena that accompany states of joy or grief, although the motifs of laughter and the motifs of sighs do not have only their jarring disconnectedness in common. But this particular character belongs just as much to excessive joy as it does to manifestations of excessive grief. The same chokes, spaced out cries, and the same gasps are found in both instances. Moreover, this conformity even highlights how much these themes differ in shape

⁴⁹ [This cantata was composed by Georg Philipp Telemann. Unger, *Handbook*, 553.—Trans.]

⁵⁰ Second bass aria from the cantata *Selig ist der Mann, der die Anfechtung erduldet* (BWV 57/5, mm. 50–53).

⁵¹ Chorus from the cantata *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben* (BWV 102/1, mm. 45–59).

and tone! It is enough to cast a glance over the sprightly melisma that Bach writes on the word “Lachen” (to laugh) in the cantata *Unser Mund sei voll Lachens* to be convinced that the separated notes that end it merely bring it closer through this rather insignificant detail to the great, somber features of the straggling lines that we have cited before (ex. 3.45).



Ex. 3.45. *Unser Mund sei voll Lachens*, BWV 110/1, mm. 27–32.⁵²

On the other hand, we should place this last example opposite the arpeggio formed with staccato notes that Bach joins to the word “alleluia” in the cantata *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen* (Shout with joy to God in all lands!). Here he makes use of the resources of a somewhat forced virtuosity to show more intensely, in a final burst, the superabundant and bold feelings of joy.⁵³

In the cantata *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*, we again find a melisma formed from separated groupings that follow each other. Bach writes it corresponding to the words “Knowest thou not that God’s kindness is meant to coax thee to repentance?” The symbolic character of this sequence of elegant arabesques is obvious. They form a descending melodic progression that unfurls itself with an unbelievably insinuating charm. They follow each other in a graceful and seductive manner, and when they dip down, one by one, we think of the terraced branches of a flowering tree inclining in the wind, one after the other, toward the passer-by, within reach of her hand (ex. 3.46).



Ex. 3.46. *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*, BWV 102/4, mm. 70–76.

⁵² We find the same formula stated again on the word “lachen” in the aria “Dein Wachstum, sei feste” in the comic *Peasant Cantata* (BWV 212/19, mm. 40–58).

⁵³ See exs. 2.15a–e.

CHAPTER FOUR

SIMULTANEOUS MELODIES

Collective feelings. – Unison in the choruses. – Union of souls. – Contrapuntal symbols. – Meeting, following. – Allegorical value of consonant harmonies. – Meaning of dissonant chords. – Expressive dissonances of Bach and before him. – Mixture of images and impressions in the harmonization of the chorales for mixed voices.

Collective Feelings

Now that we have explained the symbolic nature of Bach's individual themes and we know the meanings that he expresses through his melodic figures we can turn next to studying the symbolism of the themes he brings together, and we will try to discover to what extent he is still governed by his intention to create a meaningful work when he combines several motifs. As in the preceding chapters, we will try to illuminate our study with numerous examples chosen from Bach's vocal music. In fact, the only way to avoid the danger of arriving at false conclusions is to multiply the comparisons between the different musical passages that correspond to texts with similar content or feeling.

Unison in the Choruses

It is easy to recognize that in a composition with several vocal parts, the successive evolutions of the voices, their meetings and separations, and their

harmonies and dissonances can give rise to a multitude of images that reflect—thanks to the subtle resources of musical language—several features of the ideas expressed by the words. The least musical event can, in certain cases, take on a well-determined allegorical value. We can hear an example of this happening in Lutheran churches where nothing is more common than the entire congregation participating in the chorale singing. The men's deep voices accompany, an octave lower, the women's and children's, and the prayer is raised from every heart all at once in the moving concord of vocal sound. Bach gives this simple custom a remarkable meaning. In his cantata for the celebration of the Reformation, the energetic melody of the protestant hymn par excellence, *Ein Feste Burg*, rings out as it is sung simultaneously by the basses, tenors, altos, and sopranos united in the same outcry. It bursts forth loftily on the words "And if the world were full of devils who wanted to devour us, we would not greatly fear—we shall succeed nevertheless." On hearing these steadfast words in their irresistible unison that towers above the tumult of the orchestra, we believe we are witnessing the solemn declaration of steadfastness proclaimed by a closely allied throng that is empowered by the same hopes and the same faith being threatened from all sides.¹ A similar unanimity reappears in the cantata for the council election *Wir danken dir, Gott* (We thank thee, O God) (1731). It is the act of thanks from the entire populace—a powerful "Amen"—that the choir utters on the same note, responding to the invitation from the alto recitative that recalls God's kindness and invites the faithful to praise Him.² Communal feelings are thus manifested through communal singing.

Bach expresses the same intention again to represent the idea of simultaneity—no longer in the events of the soul, but in material acts—through the choral unison at the beginning of the *Dramma per Musica* whose subject is the quarrel of Phoebus and Pan. The unison is for interpreting the words "Rapid winds, return *at the same time* to the cavern;"³ and it is worth noting that the imperative precision of this phrase is also enhanced by Bach's use of this procedure to give the declamation an incisive and rigorous character.

We find an similar example at the beginning of the cantata for the birthday of Maria Josepha, queen of Poland and electress of Saxony (8 December 1733). The first words are sung by all the voices in unison on the notes that vigorously resound with the exhortation "Strike, kettledrums; ring out, trumpets."⁴

Bach turns again to this means to emphasize a fragment of text that is highlighted in the form of a motto or maxim. Thus, in the last chorus of the *Trauer-Ode* (Funeral ode) composed in memory of Christiane Eberhardine (1727), he has the words sung in unison that Gottsched proposes to poets for engraving as an epitaph on her tomb: "She possessed virtue, gave happiness and glory to her

¹ BWV 80/5, mm. 13–43.

² BWV 29/6, mm. 7–8.

³ *Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan* (BWV 201/1, mm. 26–30).

⁴ *Dramma per Musica, Tönet, ihr Pauken!* (BWV 214/1, mm. 32–37).

subjects, and has been the most honored of queens.”⁵ In the *St. Mark Passion*, the same music is adapted to a passage that corresponds to the inscription that the writer of the original text wishes to be carved on the Savior’s sepulcher: “Your death has given me life; here I lay aside the misery of my sins and bury Jesus within my heart.”⁶

Bach takes recourse to the same device to emphasize these words in the *St. Matthew Passion* that the voices declare as having been spoken by Christ: “I am the son of God.”⁷ Lastly, to increase the intensity of the chorus’ supplication to Christ in the cantata *Bleib bei uns* (Abide with us), Bach keeps all the voices on the same pitch for uttering the words that the Evangelist attributes to the disciples of Emmaus: “Abide with us, for it would become evening, and day has declined.”⁸

Johann Adolph Scheibe describes this procedure in chapter fifty-four of his *Critischer Musikus*, which appeared in 1739. In this section of his work he deals with the epic cantatas, and he states, in principle, that in the choruses of these compositions it matters above all that the words be easily and distinctly understood. “To obtain this clarity,” he writes, “. . . one can have all the voices sing, from time to time, in unison, or in octaves. This produces a very good effect, and whatever the power and the fullness of the orchestra, the voices will, however, break through and dominate. A melody that is sung at the same time by the high and low voices (‘in Unisono or all’ Ottava’) always remains discernible and can be distinguished in the midst of the loudest tumult of instruments. Those who know how to use this advantage aptly and judiciously will give a great expressive energy to their choruses—simultaneously rendering them both sumptuous and audible. The experience and the models drawn by some skillful masters must especially guide us in this, and we will discover yet again many benefits that make no small contribution by lending grandeur and vivacity to such a chorus.”⁹

Union of Souls

Perhaps Bach’s works that we have mentioned above were among the models to which Scheibe thought of referring his readers. However, these cantatas would have been quite inaccessible and difficult to study at leisure because they in fact remained manuscripts, and they were hardly known except by those who

⁵ BWV 198/II/4, mm. 27–29.

⁶ The poetically arranged text, of which Picander is the author, was given in the preface to book 2, vol. 20 of the *Bach-Gesellschaft*.

⁷ *St. Matthew Passion* (BWV 244/67, mm. 62–63).

⁸ BWV 6/1, mm. 111–113.

⁹ Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus*, *Neue, vermehrte und verbesserte Auflage* (Leipzig: 1745), 506. See the other examples of the use of voices in octaves in the first choruses from the cantatas *Ach, wie flüchtig* (BWV 26/1, mm. 18–19; mm. 22–23) and *Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen* (BWV 65/1, mm. 51–52).

performed them. Nevertheless, the originality and vigor of this simultaneous writing for voices was quite striking, so it would have been noticed in a concert and remembered. Moreover, we should add that the only cantata by Bach that was published in his lifetime provides an example of choral arranging similar to these we are examining here. It is one of his first compositions: the cantata *Gott ist mein König*, written for the election of the council of the imperial free city of Mülhausen in 1708. In the second chorus, the voices unite on the sopranos' low C. They repeat it several times, as in a reading of the liturgy, and they end this somber declamation with a quasi-Gregorian cadence in which, still unified, they seem to imitate the familiar "Amen" formula.¹⁰ The words that Bach accompanies in this way are taken from the nineteenth verse of Psalm 74. Along with this vague psalmodic reminiscence, the very clear intention appears here of bringing out, through this combined accentuation, the prayer directed to the Lord not to abandon "the souls of His turtledoves" to the enemy.¹¹ But an understanding of this passage would be incomplete if we ignore the symbolic idea that Bach follows by concentrating the voices on a single note in this way. He has meant to portray, in allegorical form, the absolute harmony of souls that the same plea brings together and melds. This interpretation is confirmed with the aid of evidence drawn from analogous examples. In fact, in the cantata *Jesu, nun sei gepreiset* (O Jesu, now be praised), we encounter a phrase by the whole chorus no longer sung on the same note but written harmonically and rhythmically in a fauxbourdon style, where the four parts sing a sequence of uniform chords proceeding at the same pace. This grouping is connected to a recitative in which the bass declaims "Yet since the enemy seeks by day and night to do us harm and disturb our tranquility, therefore mayest thou, O Lord God hear us when we pray in holy communion: crush Satan under our feet." At the moment the singer begins to utter the last words, "crush Satan under our feet," the chorus joins him in stressing each syllable equally. It is like a congregation's response to an invitation to prayer when, at the sound of the officiating clergyman's voice, everyone suddenly rises to recite the hallowed invocations along with him (ex. 4.1).

¹⁰ See the *Neu Leipziger Gesangbuch* by Vopelius (1683).

¹¹ BWV 71/6, mm. 32–36.

The image shows a musical score for two staves, likely representing different voices or instruments. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both staves show a series of chords and single notes, with German lyrics written below them. The lyrics are: "den Sa-tan un-ter uns're Füß - se tre - - - ten. Satan under our feet to tread." The bottom staff has additional lyrics: "den Sa - - - - ten un-ter uns're Füße tre - - - ten Satan under our feet to tread".

Ex. 4.1 *Jesu, nun sei gepreiset*, BWV 41/5, mm. 6–10.

As in the cantata *Gott ist mein König*, Bach's plan in this work appears complex. Not only does he adopt the melody from the German litany for these few phrases that are drawn from it, but the accompaniment he adds to it has a twofold meaning. It is a description of collective prayer as it rises in the heart and is spoken aloud. As a poet, Bach speaks to us here of the union of souls; as a musician, he represents it by uniting the voices. In this setting, he mingles tradition, symbolism, and the pictorial. In doing so, he also revives a portrayal by Heinrich Schütz. The words from Psalm 84, "Lord, God of hosts, hear my prayer," etc., in Schütz's psalms (1619), are, in fact, intoned by two four-voice choirs united on the tonic chord of C minor, whose notes are found doubled in a way that reproduces the low and regular murmur of a group praying aloud. The Israelites' curse is declaimed the same way by all the parts simultaneously, in a strident harmony, of this verse from Psalm 137: "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem . . ." ¹²

Contrapuntal Symbols

Bach makes still more allusions through the simple combination of different voices. In this way, the contrast between the singing of one voice and the singing of many is enough to give birth to ingenious metaphors. In the cantata *Brich dem Hungrigen dein Brot*, he shows, through the reciprocity of very well-chosen musical images, the opposition of the two ideas expressed in the phrase "If you see someone naked, then clothe him." The basses, unaccompanied, sing the first words, "If you see someone naked," as the musical equivalent of the idea of nakedness. Then, in contrast, the chorus, accompanied by the continuo and several

¹² Heinrich Schütz, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Spitta (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1885–1927), 2:115; 3:30.

instruments, unfolds itself in broad drapings for urging the merciful charity signified by the words “clothe him.”¹³

At the end of the third movement’s soprano solo in the *Magnificat*, the five-part chorus suddenly intervenes, seizing the last words—“Omnes generations” (All generations)—and, as if possessed, repeats them continually amidst the wide scrolls of contrapuntal outpouring that would be sufficient unto itself were it not joined to the solo immediately preceding it.¹⁴ But the original idea for this crude interpretation does not belong to Bach. Hermann Kretzschmar notes that, in their “Magnificats,” Ruggiero Fedeli and Tommaso Albinoni had already made use of this overlapping of phrases to contrast between the “solo” and “tutti.”¹⁵ We should also note that for a long time composers had applied themselves to rendering numerical or quantitative notions appreciable through detail or through voice grouping. In a response from the Holy Week service, “Unus ex discipulis meis tradet me hodie” (One of my disciples will betray me today), Vittoria has the tenor sing alone on the word “unus,” and the other voices do not come in until “ex discipulis meis.”¹⁶ In his *Passion according to St. Matthew*, Soriano is careful to allow only three voices to sing the passage “Et in triduo reaedificas illud” (And in three days dost rebuild it).¹⁷

Meeting, Following

All these allusions are as easy to create as they are to comprehend. For the composer, it is little more than a game to imagine them, and the listener only needs a little attentiveness to understand him. However, more technical skill is obviously needed by Bach to transpose into music the idea of the words “to meet each other.” Although he produces it by elementary means, this image is not entirely clear on first hearing, except to those for whom the rules and uses of counterpoint are not completely foreign. In fact, to translate the words “to meet each other” in the cantata *Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende* he uses a procedure whose symbolic value remains hidden to anyone not able to recognize what, in counterpoint, is called contrary movement and the crossing of parts. Coming from two opposite points, the tenor and the alto join each other on the same note, pass beyond it in contrary directions, return to it again, and then finally separate.¹⁸ To appreciate this coming and going and these meetings, we must know how to listen carefully so we can distinguish each part we are hearing. If we do not, we will not

¹³ BWV 39/1, mm. 94–95.

¹⁴ BWV 243/3, mm. 25–51.

¹⁵ Kretzschmar, *Führer durch den Concertstaal, Zweite Abtheilung, erster Theil: Kirchliche Werke*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: 1895), 310.

¹⁶ Carl Proske, *Musica divina* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1853–76), 1st year, 4:166.

¹⁷ Proske, *Musica divina*, 15. Cf. p. 22.

¹⁸ BWV 28/6, mm. 21–22.

catch the allusion. What's more, Bach expresses this without a hint of scholastic dullness or pedantry. He doesn't place himself at the service of skill here, and he maintains a discrete relation to it. He makes use of these contrapuntal elements quite spontaneously, just as a writer turning to a familiar metaphor. He deeply inhabits this musical language that is so rich in comparisons, and, all things considered, these details of craft are sometimes merely the subconscious play on words so fundamental to his style.

With the same delicacy and naturalness, he represents Christ's walking in the lead and showing the way to celestial Jerusalem in the cantata *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen* (O king-of-heaven, welcome!) (ex. 4.2).

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass

Er ge-het vor-an und öff-net die Bahn, er ge-het
 He goes before us and opens the way, he goes

Ex. 4.2. *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen*, BWV 182/8, mm. 90–95.¹⁹

In the same cantata, Bach also expresses the following words through a contrapuntal effect: “Thou hast captured our heart, O King of heaven, welcome!” For telling of the unanimity of the feeling of love that Jesus has evoked, he has each voice sing the same motif that we have just seen above. They do not utter it simultaneously, but repeat it instead, one after the other in a rigorously observed canon. In using this musical form that demands such strict adherence, Bach has wanted to symbolize the absolute subjection of the soul possessed by the Lord (ex. 4.3).

¹⁹ We recognize here a process familiar to the masters of the 16th century. In the motet *O quam gloriosum*, Vittoria (1540?–after 1613) similarly interprets, through contrapuntal imitations, the words “sequuntur agnum quocunque ierit” (follow the lamb whithersoever He goeth) in Charles Bordes’s *Anthologie des Maîtres religieux primitives* (Paris: Schola Cantorum, ca. 1900), 1:3.

Soprano Du hast uns das Herz ge-nommen, Himmelskönig sei willkommen!
 Thou hast our heart captured, King-of-heaven welcome!
 (Thou hast captured our heart, O King-of-heaven welcome!)

Alto Du hast, etc.
 Thou hast, etc.

Tenor Du hast, etc.
 Thou hast, etc.

Bass Du hast uns das Herz genommen, Himmelskönig sei willkommen
 Thou hast our heart captured, King-of-heaven welcome!
 (Thou hast captured our heart, O King-of-heaven welcome!)

Ex. 4.3. *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen*, BWV 182/2, mm. 28–30.

This imitation procedure recurs with more brilliance and less formalism in the choruses of praise. Whereas in the above example Bach emphasizes the idea of subjection, he aspires to evoke through these explosive choruses the celestial choirs that eternally pursue blessed thoughts. Here he duplicates in all the voices the broad lines by which he regularly characterizes joyous feelings. In each voice, the melismas unfold and repeat the same jubilation found in the opening choruses of the two cantatas that begin with the words “Praise the Lord, my soul” (exs. 4.4a, b).

Alto *tr* *tr*

Lo - - - - - (be)
 Praise - - - - -

Tenor *tr*

Lo - - - - - (be)
 Praise - - - - -

Ex. 4.4a. *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele II*, BWV 69/1, mm. 24–26.

Lo Praise — — — — — be

Soprano

Alto

Lo Praise — — — — — be

Lo Praise — — — — — be

Tenor

Bass

Lo Praise — — — — — be

Ex. 4.4b. *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele I*, BWV 143/1, mm. 8–11.

The word “gelobet” (blessed) adorned with similarly organized motifs at the beginnings of the cantatas *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* and *Gelobet sei der Herr, mein Gott* (Blessed be the Lord, my God).²⁰

The Allegorical Value of Consonant Harmonies

Up to now, we have studied the construction of motifs from the point of view of their meaning, their imitation, and their repetition, but we have not taken into account—or just barely—their harmonic components. In fact, we have only considered one harmonic aspect: the use of unisons and octaves, whose symbolic function we have just described. And, even in the passages composed with a succession of chords in the fauxbourdon style, it is the rhythmic simultaneity of their declamation that has the greatest effect and shows best Bach’s allegorical intent.

In contrast, we will now closely examine the expressive resources Bach extracts from the essence of the harmonies themselves according to the notes we find grouped in consonant or dissonant intervals.

²⁰ BWV 91 and 129. Broad melismas unfurl in this way in all the voices in the first choruses of the cantatas *Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir* (BWV 130) and *Man singet mit Freuden vom Sieg* (BWV 149). We should also note the application of an analogous procedure by G. M. Nanino (c. 1544–1607) in the motet *Hodie Christus natus est* to the words “laetantur Archangeli” (archangels are glad) (Bordes, *Anthologie*, 1:19).

We have begun to see how he represents the unity of a collective feeling experienced by everyone all at once through having the various choral voices sing the same motif at the same time. He also expresses this kindred feeling among souls by accompanying the melody unfurled by only one voice with a parallel melody of the same shape and rhythm sung by a second voice at a third or sixth from the first. He often uses this procedure when the text evokes ideas of benediction or blessedness, and through the gentle sameness of these connected garlands, gracefully duplicating the same contours, the music proclaims the perfect harmony and the calm joy of souls joined in a kindred serenity. Moreover, it is very likely that, with his sensitivity to nuance, Bach intends a distinction between the slightly cool caress of successive thirds and the penetrating sweetness of repeated sixths. In the duet from the cantata *Ein feste burg* the alto and tenor move through a series of thirds on the first words of the phrase “How blessed indeed are those who hold God in their mouths.” But when they follow with the words “Yet more blessed is the heart that holds Him in faith,” they take up the more profound harmony of repeated sixths to increase the warm tenderness. So it seems that the very progression of the text has permeated the music and that it radiates a more intense and miraculous joy because of these new harmonies.²¹

In a host of other instances we see thirds and sixths mingled indiscriminately, alternating or repeating, joined to words such as “How I will rejoice”;²² “Peace on earth . . . and goodwill to mankind!”;²³ “Well for me! Jesus is found. Now I am no longer saddened. He, whom my soul loves, appears to me in joyous hours”;²⁴ and “Oh, how fate has been favorable to us.”²⁵ Bach uses sixths to begin the duo for bass and tenor written to the words “O God, thou who art called love” in the cantata *Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ* (Alone toward thee, Lord Jesus Christ).²⁶ He unfurls a melisma sung in sixths on the word “Wonne” (bliss) in the duet for tenor and soprano from the cantata *Christ lag in Todes Banden*.²⁷ On the other hand, thirds follow each other perpetually in the duo for soprano and alto with the text “(O) blessed Christians, happy flock, come present yourselves before Jesus with gratitude” in the cantata *Erwünschtes Freudenlicht* (O hoped for light of joy).²⁸

²¹ BWV 80/7, mm. 17–56.

²² Cantata *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal* (BWV 146/7, mm. 21–138).

²³ Cantata *Unser Mund sei voll Lachens* (BWV 110/5, mm. 24–48).

²⁴ Cantata *Mein Liebster Jesus ist verloren* (BWV 154/7, mm. 7–50).

²⁵ Cantata for the dedication of the organ in Störmthal (BWV 194/II/4, mm. 31–40). See also, for the expression of the words “Wohlthun” (good deed) and “Wohlsein” (good health), the duet already cited from the cantata *Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende* (BWV 28/ 5, m. 19).

²⁶ BWV 33/5, mm. 16–19,

²⁷ BWV 4/7, mm. 6–8.

²⁸ BWV 184/2, mm. 32–40. I note here that Heinrich Schütz already gives us this uniting of voices in pleasant consonances for expressing the idea of a happy state. See “wohl” (well, happy) in Schütz, *Sämtliche Werke*, 7:161.

The perfect union of souls sharing the same feeling is expressed symbolically through consonances in the duets from the cantatas *Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild* (God the Lord is sun and shield), *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange* (My God, how long, ah (how) long?), *Ein Herz, das seinen Jesum lebend weiss*, and in the duo for soprano and bass in part three of the *Christmas Oratorio*.²⁹

The Meaning of Dissonant Chords

In contrast to these mellow chords and peaceful consonances—uniform interpreters of sustained delights and shared joys—vibrates the complex throng of harsh chords that are harbingers of curses and sorrows. In the cantata *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen*, which Bach wrote around 1714 or 1715,³⁰ he accompanies the word “Leiden” (sorrow) with deliberately varied bitter harmonies (ex. 4.5a). On the word “betrübt” (grievest), the four voices resonate dolefully in the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* (ex. 4.5b). Elsewhere, “Schmerz” (suffering)³¹ and “sterben” (to die)³² are sung on prolonged dissonances by several parts.

(Lie-) ben und Lei - - - - - den
love and sorrow - - - - - den

Lei - - - - - den
Sorrow - - - - - den

Ex. 4.5a. *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen*, BWV 182/8, mm. 58–62.

²⁹ BWV 79; BWV 155; BWV 134; BWV 248.

³⁰ [This cantata was first performed for Palm Sunday, 25 March 1714 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 264.—Trans.]

³¹ Cantata *Du Friedefürst, Herr Jesu Christ* (BWV 116/4, mm. 80–82).

³² Cantata *Christus, der ist mein Leben* (BWV 95/1, mm. 20–29).



Ex. 4.5b. *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/6, mm. 1–2.

At the beginning of the cantata *Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht* (Take not offense, O soul), the verb “to take offense” is declaimed by the discord of voices whose successive harmonies spread out in a series of clashes.³³

Expressive Dissonances of Bach and before Him

This expressive use of dissonances is nothing new—at least not in its intent. All 17th-century music-making used them in this way, and the masters of the preceding century very often showed that they knew their full meaning too. In 1592, in his *Melopoeia*, Sethus Calvisius recommended adding dissonant pitches to passages where the text set to music calls for a harsher harmony (“ut harmonia, si sententia textus id requirat, exasperetur”) (roughen the harmony, if the judgment of the text requires it),³⁴—an advice repeated by Johann Crüger in 1624 in his *Synopsis musica*.³⁵

As to the make-up of these emotionally stirring chords, it had likewise been established for quite a long time before the theoreticians first prepared rules for governing them. Composers had already responded to the general concept of accentuating harsh textual wordings with harsh harmonies by unleashing upon these tragic phrases a capricious and terrifying horde of “wrong” notes. They were intoxicated to the point of delirium by the disturbing ambrosia that fills souls with an unsettling music pierced by clashing voices. We need not give an account here of the odd attempts mixed with happy accidents that bend and color the harmonic language of the late 16th-century masters;³⁶ however, we should note that we are greatly indebted to their trials and errors. Many new riches evolved from the jumbled whirlpool of these experiments that remain with us to this day. The

³³ BWV 186/1, mm. 9–11.

³⁴ Calvisius, *Melopoeia, sive Melodiae condendae Ratio*, Chap. 6, “De Dissonantiis per se” (Erfurt: 1582).

³⁵ Crüger, *Synopsis musica*, 6:46.

³⁶ See the astonishing harmonic progressions of Gesualdo, prince of Venosa. Cf. Ambros, *Geshichte der Music* (1862–82), 4:236 and following pages.

revolutionaries who were condemned as destroyers of music by the defenders of the old rules have enlightened us. Artusi was still bent on the banishing of altered intervals in which he says thirds and fourths are mistaken for each other,³⁷ even though Giovanni Gabrieli had already given proof of the marvelous resonance of chords where questionable thirds are joined with safe ones.³⁸ And beginning in his very first works, Schütz, Gabrieli's pupil, seizes upon these combinations.

Let us consider now the first of the two preceding examples. We find in its second measure precisely this harmony familiar to Schütz who readily accompanied sorrowful words in this fashion.³⁹ Actually, Bach knows how to render it even harsher here through the dissonance he adds with the tenors' held note. In the second example, on the other hand, we can also recognize the inheritance from early 17th-century reformers by his use of the diminished seventh chord whose penetrating moans of despair Claudio Monteverdi had previously embraced.

But it is enough here merely to point out the similarity of Bach's intentions to those of Gabrieli, Monteverdi, and Schütz. In his realization, Bach, enriched by a whole century of passionate music, manifests even more freely and with his characteristic intensity the contortions of a soul smitten by sorrow. He intensifies the elements of pathos he inherited from his forerunners in order to affect more powerfully his listeners who are already accustomed to the thorny caress of discords. Furthermore, he instinctively adds to these resources that were handed down to him by augmenting them in all sorts of ways. Sometimes he enlivens their harshness by mixing in a new dissonance that further aggravates them, and sometimes he unexpectedly juxtaposes chords that, sounding alone, would pass by barely noticed but whose neighboring chords cause them to stand out, or whose unexpected strain is caused by the tonal contradiction they create in the piece. We can cite here the sequence of dissonant chords he combines on the words "wer euch tötet" (whoever kills you) in the cantata *Sie werden euch in den Bann tun I* (They will place you into excommunication).⁴⁰

³⁷ For example F to C sharp in *L'Artusi overo delle Imperfettioni della moderna Musica* (1603), part 2:9.

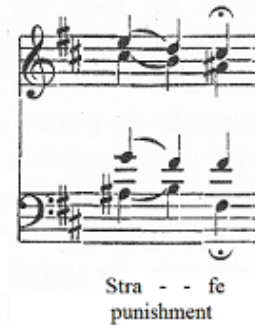
³⁸ Compare with Carl von Winterfeld's *Giovanni Gabrieli und sein Zeitalter* (Berlin: 1834), part 3, p. 12.

³⁹ Schütz uses it at the beginning of the psalm *Aus der Tiefe* (From the depth of the abyss) (*Die mehrchörigen Psalmen*, 1629, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Spitta, 2:130). He also uses it on the word "weinen" (to weep) in the *Historia von der Auferstehung Jesu Christ*, 1623 (*Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Spitta, vol. 1). This penetrating harmonization is also joined to words of supplication and tenderness whose stress requires more intensity, for example, on the word "gnädig" (merciful) (*Kleine geistliche concerte*, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Spitta, pt. 1, vol. 6, no. 8). Bach also gives it this character of fervent invocation in the first chorus of the cantata *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben!* (BWV 102/1, m. 67).

⁴⁰ BWV 44/2, mm. 5–7.

*The Mixing of Images and Impressions
in the Harmonization of the Chorales for Mixed Voices*

Perhaps better than anywhere else, we can study the meaning Bach aspires to give dissonant chords in many of his chorale harmonizations. They are, moreover, the only means he had to comment on the text of these hymns that had already been given a almost inalterable melody. Examples abound in which words of affliction receive the somber adornment of uncertain or biting sonorities—symbols of unrest, bitterness,⁴¹ punishment, torment, pain, and sin (exs. 4.6a–d).



Ex. 4.6a. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/II/55, m. 3.



Ex. 4.6b. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/I/11, m. 4.

⁴¹ BWV 245/37, mm. 1–8.



Die Sünd' macht Leid
Sin produces sorrow

Ex. 4.6c. *Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes*, BWV 40/3, mm. 1–2.



und trä - gest Schmerz
and bearest sorrow

Ex. 4.6d. *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz*, BWV 138/1, mm. 14–16.

On the word “Schmerz” (sorrow) in this last example, Bach replicates this altered chord whose mysterious harshness, as we have said, Schütz favored. The same chord also appears when Bach wants to accompany the threatening words of the hymn *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort!* “For this pain will end when God is no longer eternal” (ex. 4.7a). He uses the chord again in his reproach to the “ancient serpent” (“alte Schlange”) of the Bible: “Why renewest thou thy sting?” (ex. 4.7b).

Denn wird sich en-den die - se Pein
For then will end this pain
(For this pain will end)

Ex. 4.7a. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*, BWV 20/7, mm. 6–8.

Was er - neu'rst du dein - nen Stich?
Why renewest thou thy sting?

Ex. 4.7b. *Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes*, BWV 40/6, mm. 5–6.

We can see that the harmonic tension in these last examples is caused by the presence of chromatic motifs in the bass whose significance we recognized in an earlier chapter. The ascending theme appears in these citations with the same expression as the descending theme. However, as we have already seen, it is also associated with the idea of desire in accompaniments of this kind. We come across it in this respect in the cantata *Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn* at the end of the last chorale when the text speaks of directing our minds, all our desires and thoughts to God (ex. 4.8a). In contrast to this example, there is another where the descending chromatic theme, evoked by words with a sorrowful meaning, brings about a bold harmonic progression full of surprises (ex. 4.8b).



den Sinn und all' Be - - gehr - - - den
our mind and all our desires

Ex. 4.8a. *Herr Christ, der einge Gottes-Sohn*, BWV 96/6, mm. 6–8.



mein gros - ser Jam - mer bleibt dar - nie - den
my great misery remains below

Ex. 4.8b. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*, BWV 60/5, mm. 15–17.

On the the other hand, in the measures sung just before these last ones, the words “I depart securely in peace” are highlighted by an even and gently enlivened motif in the basses. Likewise, in the bass part of a chorale from the *St. Matthew Passion*, Bach creates a discrete allusion to the words “He gives to clouds and breezes their course to run.”⁴² In these two cases he uses melodic patterns similar to those that we have seen him lay out for portraying the action of walking, of following a path, etc.

The direct effectiveness of the harmonies and the continual stating of the allegorical themes aids the interpretation of the evangelical chorales. Thanks to this double influence, Bach’s accompaniments are both striking and revelatory: on one hand, he evokes sensations, and, on the other, images. Often, as we saw in the preceding examples, the effects of the two procedures converge. But this coalition is not necessary because, without uniting these two expressive forces, he can still extract the dominant traits of the religious poetry that he is accompanying and

⁴² BWV 244/44, mm. 6–8.

attempt to equalize their richness of feelings and images. In the first chorus of *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*, it suffices for him to repeat a motif that accentuates the notes of the familiar ascending chromatic theme to give his accompaniment a sorrowful unity of mood.⁴³ And in the first chorus from the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, he likewise links the chromatic motifs with words that recall that Jesus suffered death so that souls can be rescued “out of the devil’s dark cavern.”⁴⁴ The first chorus of the cantata *Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein* is also filled with the moan of descending half-steps—a moan reflecting an altered form a melodic fragment of the chorale on which the chorus is based.⁴⁵ When its text speaks of sin and injustice, some chromatic formulas also appear in the vocal accompaniment to the chorale *Aus der tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* (Out of deep distress I cry to thee) at the beginning of the cantata based on that hymn.⁴⁶

On the the other hand, in the German *Magnificat* large, jubilant melismas radiate in the procession created by the voices to the melody of *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren* for rendering palpable the great outpourings of joy—of which the word “freuen” (rejoice) is the supreme spokesman in this liturgical hymn.⁴⁷ The first chorus from the cantata *Herr Gott, dich loben wir* (Lord God, we praise thee) unites the supple praises of the bass, tenor, and alto—sung at their fullest breath capacity—with the “cantus firmus” of the chorale entrusted to the soprano.⁴⁸ It is the same at the opening of the cantata *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*, where the old hymn’s melody in the soprano dominates the continual arabesques of the other parts.⁴⁹ In the paraphrase of the first verse of the chorale *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* (“Wake up!” call the voices), the “alleluia” radiates freely from the choir with a similar magnificence as it unfurls opposing the solemn pace of the hallowed theme.⁵⁰

Furthermore, the choir overflows with life and action in this composition. It pounces on every word like a versatile actor who elevates every utterance he speaks. It never stops being prey to the inspiration the poet breathes into it, and it fervently repeats, amplifies, and animates the chorale phrases stated by the sopranos with an unvarying unity. The tenors’ brilliant ascent ending on a vigorously sustained note is imitated by the altos and basses. It signals the night watchmen’s clear call high up in a turret (ex. 4.9a). Further on, cries of joy and watchwords resound beneath the calm chorale like a multitude of shouts echoing all around (ex. 4.9b).

⁴³ BWV 3/1, mm. 10–11, 19–20 et seq.

⁴⁴ BWV 78/1, mm. 17–42.

⁴⁵ BWV 2/1, mm. 8–15.

⁴⁶ BWV 38/1, mm. 99–116.

⁴⁷ BWV 10/1, mm. 28–36.

⁴⁸ BWV 16/1, mm. 5–34.

⁴⁹ BWV 91/1, mm. 12–17.

⁵⁰ BWV 140/1, mm. 135–156.

Tenor

Der Wäch-ter sehr hoch - - auf der Zin - - - ne
Of the watchmen very high - - upon the battlement

Ex. 4.9a. *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140/1, mm. 30–35.

Bass Tenor Alto Tenor Bass Tenor

Wohl auf, wohl auf, wohl auf, wohl auf, wohl auf, wohl auf, wohl auf!
Arise then, arise then, arise then, arise then, arise then, arise then, arise then!

Ex. 4.9b. *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140/1, mm. 116–119.

Although Bach's musical interpretation of the poetic text is excluded from the virtually unalterable, pre-determined chorale melody, he further protects the melody by having it sung in the accompanying voices. He draws liberally on this means of expression and goes out of his way to give it deep meaning. Sometimes he forms it from detached notes whose separation seems to show that they are sufficient unto themselves when interpreting the word "genug" (enough),⁵¹ or else he decides that this interrupted sequence will symbolize the idea of dividing up or splitting into pieces.⁵² In the first chorus from the cantata *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*, while the chorale melody is in the bass part, the sopranos describe with an agile melisma the final pilgrimage of the soul toward heaven after they have sung, on a rhythmically lugubrious motif, of the anguishes of "the narrow path" that must be taken to get there.⁵³ The fracas on the word "toben" (rage) snarls in the three lower voice parts amplifying the chorale melody sung by the sopranos in the first chorus from the cantata *Wo Gott, der Herr, nicht bei uns hält* (Where God the Lord does not stand with us).⁵⁴ And while the sopranos carry the hymn-tune *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*, the entreaty on the word "flehen" (implore) becomes more urgent and even seems to weep when the tenors and basses repeat it in a mournful way after having powerfully enunciated the short exhortation "Watch" along with the altos (ex. 4.10).

⁵¹ Cantata *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her* (BWV 9/1, mm. 99–105).

⁵² BWV 178/1, m. 91.

⁵³ BWV 3/1, mm. 38–41 and 47–52.

⁵⁴ BWV 178/1, mm. 22–27.

wache, fleh' und be - te, fleh' und be - - te
 watch, implore and pray, implore and pray - -

Ex. 4.10. *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*, BWV 115/1, mm. 17–20.

In this last example, the voices add more emotion than imagery to the chorale setting. They reveal the deep feeling of anxiety that reigns over the words “get thyself prepared, my soul. Watch, implore, and pray that the evil time doth not unexpectedly befall thee.” It is the innermost character of the poetry that shows through here in the choir’s accentuations. The same uniquely expressive tendency in the vocal parts is seen again in the sorrowful harmonies joined to the word “betrüben” (grieve) in the cantata *Was willst du dich betrüben* (Why wouldst thou grieve);⁵⁵ on the word “Leiden” (suffering) in the cantata *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr’ Mensch und Gott* (Lord Jesus Christ, true man and God);⁵⁶ and on the word “Angst” (anxiety) in the cantata *Wo soll ich fliehen hin* (Where shall I flee).⁵⁷ Elsewhere, the tenors and altos never tire of reiterating an imploring motif while the oboe and trumpet sound the chorale melody in this verse from the cantata *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren*: “He remembers his mercy and helps his servant Israel.”⁵⁸

At other times, the choir intervenes with peaceful motifs and sweet harmonies—that is to say, “consonant,” according to the accepted meaning that the term then had—for adding a kind of palpable charm to words of tenderness. Thus, at the beginning of the cantata based upon the chorale *Liebster Immanuel, Herzog der Frommen* (Dearest Emmanuel, prince of the righteous)⁵⁹ the altos and tenors state this hymn’s theme in sixths and continue for two measures without diverging. In these circumstances, the extreme simplicity of the procedure produces a particularly delightful effect. It’s as if these two isolated voices are leading up to the chorus with the tune of a naïve and sentimental folksong. Happily, at the beginning of the second verse, Bach renews their duet’s harmony on an avowal

⁵⁵ BWV 107/1, mm. 12–14.

⁵⁶ BWV 127/1, mm. 55–62.

⁵⁷ BWV 5/1, mm. 54–60.

⁵⁸ BWV 10/5, mm. 5–30.

⁵⁹ BWV 123/1, mm. 5–31.

imbued with loving intimacy: “Thou hast captured my heart, O highest treasure.” The entire first chorus is permeated by the sweetness that pours forth from the harmonic grace of these initial invocations. The orchestra has actually presented them first, but their character is only fully revealed when their exact meaning has been put into words. In the instrumental introduction, the already pleasant motif only has the appeal of an endearing sonority that, as usual, soon seems insipid. But rendered by the voices, it becomes captivating and can reappear indefinitely in the accompaniment without becoming boring—like a friendly face whose smiling loveliness we never tire of—better known and more precious with each glance (ex. 4.11).



Ex. 4.11. *Liebster Immanuel, Herzog der Frommen*, BWV 123/1, m. 22.

CHAPTER FIVE

COMMENTARY FROM THE INSTRUMENTAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Direction of motifs. – Contrapuntal allusions. – Ideas of unity, continuation, and obligation. – Instruments amplify the vocal motifs. – The joy of bright motifs. – Chromatic themes. – The motif of tears. – Rhythms in the accompaniment: Calm. – Tumult. – Meaning of accompaniments formed from repeated notes: Realistic images. – Symbols of uniformity and lethargy. – Motifs of sleep. – Peace and death. – Examples of these descriptions in Bach's forerunners. – Disjointed rhythms, rhythms of heaviness. – Description of movement. – Broken-up accompaniments. – Meaningful harmony in the accompaniment.

Direction of Motifs

Bach's essential expressive resources are not confined to the musical speech of human voices. Their words most certainly render his expression as explicit and direct as possible, but these transparent and definite vocal interpretations are not the only ones he lays out. They are reflected, prolonged, and evolved, so to speak, in the continual commentary by the instruments that accompany them. In fact, we also find in this non-verbal singing the expressive elements of his word-by-word fidelity whose forms we have been studying up to now. The translation process remains the same here in the instrumental writing, but it contains greater richness, a greater variety of images, and just as much precision. Our previous method of

comparison that we have used continuously until now will serve us once more in identifying and classifying the principle types of these instrumental motifs. Furthermore, our investigation will be made easier by the results we have found from our research in the preceding chapters that give us a new basis for comparison. Not only will we be able to show that similar musical figures correspond with texts of the same content, but now we will also have a means of comparing these instrumental motifs, whose significance we want to understand, with the vocal motifs whose meaning has been established through our earlier critical research.

Therefore, the characteristics of a melody without words will appear distinctly to us in the instances where it is paired with a vocal melody, and the compositions where this mutual setting of voice and instruments is easiest to perceive are the arias and recitatives accompanied solely by basso continuo. In fact, these accompaniments are reduced to a kind of sketch or outline of features in which the vicissitudes of the text, when they are redrawn there, are found engraved in clear contours. However, we will not linger right now over making a special study of the pictorial motifs that Bach presents solely with the help of the basso continuo. This is because the formulas we want to explain are not particular to the bass line but are met quite often in all the orchestral parts; so, without taking into account their place in the orchestra, we will classify the instrumental motifs according to their structural similarities to the vocal motifs. To proceed otherwise would risk being repetitive.

We will notice, nevertheless, that certain figures take on a greater importance in the bass line than in other parts. In fact, the orchestral bass powerfully manifests the symbols of weight and depth. The abyss of cavernous notes is part of its domain, and it descends there well beyond the limits that human voices can reach. Also, it frequently happens that the image of a descending motion begun by the vocal line is completed and amplified in its effect by being passed over to the orchestra. In the last aria of the cantata *Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust* (O happy rest, beloved joy-of-soul), the basso continuo takes over the long descent begun by the alto that depicts the procession to the grave—"this dwelling place where I may be at rest" (ex. 5.1a). In the bass aria of the cantata *Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort*, the downfall declaimed by the singer is instantly carried out by the accompanimental motif (ex. 5.1b). And in the *St. John Passion*, when the evangelist tells that the temple curtain was torn in two pieces from top to bottom, the image begun in his vocal part ends tumultuously with the instrumental scale that immediately follows (ex. 5.1c).

Wo-selbst ich ru - - - - - hig bin.
Where I at rest - - - - - may be.
(Where I may be at rest)

Ex. 5.1a. *Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust*, BWV 170/5, mm. 57–60.

Stürze du Bo - - den
Cast down to the ground

Ex. 5.1b. *Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort*, BWV 126/4, mm. 9–10.

Tenor
Von oben an bis un-ten aus
from top to bottom of
etc.

Ex. 5.1c. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/II/33, mm. 2–3.

After the words “I have the desire to part from this world,” at the end of the tenor recitative in the cantata *Komm, du süsse Todesstunde* (Come, thou sweet hour-of-death), the instrumental bass portrays with a large, falling phrase the waning of life that gently prepares the release of the soul, liberated little by little from the weakening body drawn down toward the earth.¹

Moreover, Bach describes many times the pilgrimage leading to the grave’s peace with the help of slowly flagging motifs. Toward the end of the poetic bass recitative that precedes the last aria of the *St. Matthew Passion*, there appears,

¹ BWV 161/2, mm. 20–21.

in a short vocal phrase, the sudden rendering of these types of descending arpeggios reflect burial. In fact, in this phrase we find the model, so often drawn upon elsewhere, joined to the words “His body comes to rest” (ex. 5.2a). And in a purely instrumental rendering, the same theme recurs persistently in the chorus of the burial scene that ends this Passion (ex. 5.2b). Bach also employs it in the funeral chorus ending the *St. John Passion*, where the bass voices enunciate the theme on the words “gentle rest,” and the pattern passes through the whole orchestra from the violins down to the continuo (ex. 5.2c).



Ex. 5.2.a. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/II/75, mm. 12–13.



Ex. 5.2.b. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/II/78, mm. 1–3.

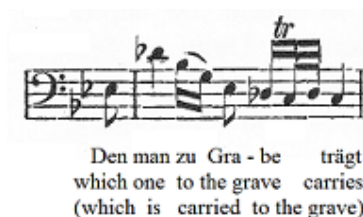


Ex. 5.2c. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/II/39, mm. 39–43.

In the cantata *Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht* we find a vocal interpretation of the same motif (ex. 5.3a) that agrees exactly with the preceding one; and in the second aria from the cantata *Ich habe genug*, which expresses the impassioned desire for death, this motif is presented again in the accompaniment to the words “But there, there shall I see sweet peace, quiet rest” (ex. 5.3b). The tenor aria of the cantata *Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ* (I cry to thee, Lord Jesus Christ) gives us another example of the use of the descending arpeggio in the basso continuo when the singer repeats the word “Sterben” (to die).² The relation of this motif to words that evoke images of death—and particularly of burial—is constant. In the same respect, we can then take the slow arpeggios accompanying the first chorus from

² BWV 177/4, mm. 86–88.

the cantata *Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende* (Who knows how near to me my end is?) as a definite allusion to the placing of the body in the grave (ex. 5.3c).



Ex. 5.3a. *Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht*, BWV 105/4, mm. 13–14.



Ex. 5.3b. *Ich habe genug*, BWV 82/3, mm. 83–84.



Ex. 5.3c. *Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende*, BWV 27/1, m. 1.

In the cantata *Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen* (Jesus sleeps, how can I hope?), when Bach no longer wants to describe the yearned-for death or the falling asleep of the righteous but, rather, the threatening death whose “abyss is already gaping open” before the lost sinner, a straight series of descending notes seems to announce its inexorable approach.³

It is the accompanying bass that once more emphasizes through sudden downfalls or by deep moans the expression of words stirring up visions of hell or “sinking into the abyss” in the cantatas *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*,⁴ *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her*,⁵ and in the *St. Matthew Passion*.⁶

³ BWV 81/1, mm. 2–4.

⁴ BWV 3/3, mm. 1–5.

⁵ BWV 9/3, mm. 6–12.

⁶ BWV 244/33, mm. 41–57.

It is hardly necessary to point out again that ascending instrumental motifs also contain a formal meaning resembling similarly constructed vocal motifs, but let us look at just a few examples. In the cantata *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* (God's time is the very-best time), the basso continuo interprets through repeated ascending scales in the conventional musical language the idea of rising implicit in the words "Into thy hand I commit my spirit" (ex. 5.4a). Some rapid lines played by the violins in the cantata *Wer weiss, wie nahe mit mein Ende* take flight on the words "Ye wings, come hither!" (ex. 5.4b), and the apostles' ascent toward the Mount of Olives in the *St. Matthew Passion* is represented by an ascending movement in the basso continuo.⁷



Ex. 5.4a. *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*, BWV 106/3a, m.1.



Ex. 5.4b. *Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende*, BWV 27/4, mm. 6–7.

In the *Magnificat* we hear the violins on an ascending subject that they repeat, each time a step higher, for accompanying the words "Et exultavit humiles" (and exalted the humble).⁸

A pattern that rises boldly from the depths of the orchestra and surges up anew after falling back nearly to its point of origin accompanies the aria from the cantata *Was willst du dich betrüben*: "Though even out of hell Satan himself would oppose thee and rage against thee, so he must yet desist from his intrigues amidst ridicule."⁹

As with the vocal motifs, the contrast between the climbing and descending instrumental motifs can be deeply meaningful. Just as we observed with vocal themes, the successive use of analogous instrumental figures arranged in contrary directions provides Bach with a general symbol of the ideas of opposition and reciprocity. We find some examples of this procedure in accompaniments, but first let us note that, in the passages where we cited the

⁷ BWV 244/20, m. 2.

⁸ BWV 243/8, mm. 22–28.

⁹ BWV 107/4, mm. 1–10.

melody and the words when we studied the meaning of the ascending and descending vocal motifs, the image presented by the voice is reflected exactly in the basso continuo or in the instrumental accompaniment. The opposition between the adverbs “dort” and “hier” (there, here)—so well illustrated in the bass recitative from the cantata *Ein ungefärbt Gemüthe* (An unfeigned spirit)—is emphasized again when the strings take up the motif stated by the singer.¹⁰ In the cantata *Barmherziges Herze der ewigen Liebe*, the basso continuo imitates the phrase that Bach uses to translate the idea of return already described by the voice’s words: “For the measure you give will be the measure you get in return” (ex. 5.5).



Ex. 5.5. *Barmherziges Herze der ewigen Liebe*, BWV 185/5, mm. 19–24.

The bass aria from the cantata *Wohl dem, der sich auf seinen Gott* (Happy is he who can entrust himself to his God) begins with the words “On all sides misfortune wraps around me a hundred weight of chain.” Bach represents this entwining of chains around the captive by combining two orchestral figures, each of which separately corresponds to the image of envelopment that they help to express (ex. 5.6).

Oboes d'amore I. II.

Violin

Ex. 5.6. *Wohl dem, der sich auf seinen Gott*, BWV 139/4, mm. 1–3.

¹⁰ BWV 24/4, mm. 17–18.

Broadly circling arabesques, fully unfurled in spirals, undulate in the accompaniment when the words “umfassen” (to cover) (ex. 5.7a) and “umarmen” (to embrace) (ex. 5.7b) occur in the text.

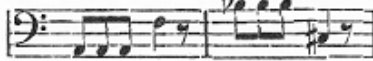


Ex. 5.7a. *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/VI/61, m. 8.

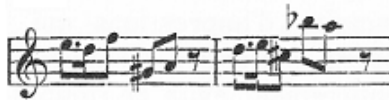


Ex. 5.7b. *Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht*, BWV 186/8, m. 1.

Elsewhere Bach intends to evoke the idea of confusion by juxtaposing motifs laid out in a contrary fashion through a succession of notes that seem thrown together by chance without any logical connection and without any plan for joining them together. We see this pattern clearly in the introduction and the accompaniment to the first aria of the cantata *Geist und Seele wird verwirret*: “Spirit and soul become bewildered, my God, when they consider thee.” The theme is formed from two separate fragments, the second of which is almost the exact inversion of the first, and this contradiction bursts forth simultaneously in both the bass line (ex. 5.8a) and the upper parts (ex. 5.8b).



Ex. 5.8a. *Geist und Seele wird verwirret*, BWV 35/2, mm. 1–2.



Ex. 5.8b. *Geist und Seele wird verwirret*, BWV 35/2, mm. 1–2.

Contrapuntal Allusions

In the course of considering music as a language full of metaphors, we gradually discover its astonishing interpretive riches, and we realize that the old

masters knew of all these resources. Their intellects were expanded through understanding the metaphors, and their memories were amply supplied with pictures. An infinity of connections were illuminated for them in the works of others, and their imaginations, excited by those associations, offered them new ideas in abundance. For the composer accustomed since childhood to enjoying the subtle linking of sounds and thoughts, nothing is easier than creating unexpectedly profound meaning from them. The book of music is open to him like a huge dictionary of disconnected words that he brings to life in all their meaningful zest by converting them from the abstract to the actual. To take a word that has been robbed of meaning in the hands of theorists, to restore it with the forgotten connections that originally served to define it and to make its meaning shine forth, to give it back its range of analogous representations and secret coincidences—all this feels easy for minds trained in the time-honored practice of intuiting the mysteries of their attributes in each domain and fathoming the delights of a literature filled with ingeniousness.¹¹

Ideas of Unity, Continuation, and Obligation

If we join the passionate wish to render audible the slightest detail with this general faculty of grasping allegories, of delighting in them, and of combining them without difficulty, we quite quickly form a style overflowing with meticulous allusions and complex symbols. But, in actuality, the intent to reach us with this multitude of images often misses its mark in both degree and purpose. If we perceive all of them, we can be overwhelmed by a tumult of impressions, and if we miss them, the composer's intention has been in vain. Bach did not entirely avoid this double danger, and we must acknowledge that often the associations he no doubt naturally and almost instinctively imagines are perceived only by experienced musicians. If we do not know some fundamentals of counterpoint we can remain quite unaware of the translation he offers for the idea of unity or community by accompanying the voice an octave below in the basso continuo. This interpretation cannot, in fact, appear completely meaningful except to those who recognize his deliberate breaking of conventional rules by composing such a series of perfect consonances. Examples of these parallel sequences are found in the cantata *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn*, that Spitta dates from 1715 (ex. 5.9a), and in the comic *Peasant Cantata (Mer hahn en neue Oberkeet)*, which is from 1742 (ex. 5.9b).

¹¹ At the Ohrdruf Lyceum where Bach studied for several years, history was learned from a book in which subtly arranged allegorical drawings helped in recalling the memory of the facts: Johannes Buno, *Historische Bilder*, 2nd ed. (Ratzeburg: Sigismund Hoffmann, 1705). Cf. the graphic fantasies of the poets at the school in Nuremberg.

Tenor

dass er mit die im Glau - ben sich ver - ei - - - -
 that he with thee in faith himself unite! - - - -
 (that he might unite himself with thee through faith!)

(ne)

Ex. 5.9a. *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn*, BWV 132/2, mm. 27–30.

In un - se - re Ge - mei - ne zieh' heu - te ganz al - lei - - ne
 In our community will today quite alone
 (In our community (many good things) will come to us today)

Continuo

Ex. 5.9b. *Mer hahn en neue Oberkeet*, BWV 212/14, mm. 96–104.

The untrained listener might more easily notice the figure with which Bach chooses to depict the verb “to follow” by repeating the motif stated in the vocal line with successive imitations in the accompaniment. We have already cited some analogous interpretations sung by the different choral voices, and the typical fragments presented below are taken from solo arias where there are instruments completing the image. We should also note that all these motifs possess a similar melodic and rhythmic structure and that they are modeled like the themes Bach uses for portraying the action of walking (exs. 5.10a–c).

Ich fol-ge Christo nach - von
I follow Christ after
(I follow after Christ)

1st Violin
2nd Vln.

Ex. 5.10a. *Weinen, Klagen, Zagen, Sorgen*, BWV 12/5, mm. 1–2.

Ich fol - ge dir gleichfalls mit
I follow you also with
(I also follow you with joyous steps)

Flute

Ex. 5.10b. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/1/9, mm. 16–18.

Ich fol - - ge dir nach, ich fol - - - - ge dir nach
I follow thee after, I follow - - - - thee after
(I follow after thee, I follow after thee)

Ex. 5.10c. *Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem*, BWV 159/2, m. 712.

We have already seen¹² that Bach did not invent the use of this contrapuntal procedure for expressing a particular idea. He uses it in a more

¹² See the preceding chapter.

personal way, though, when he wants to symbolize obedience to an ordained law whose commandments must be carried out to the letter and *followed*¹³ in every detail. So he organizes melodic sequences in the orchestra that are repeated in canonic form by two opposite sounding groups. Nothing better evokes the idea of strict obligation and complete submission than this unfurling of obviously coordinated parallel themes, one of which retraces the pattern of the other nearly note for note. It happens this way in the first chorus from the cantata *Du sollst Gott, deinen Herren, lieben von ganzen Herzen* (You shall love God, your Lord, with your whole heart) where the “tromba da tirarsi” (slide trumpet) sounds the melody of the chorale *Dies sind die heiligen zehn Gebot* (These are the holy Ten Commandments)—a melody taken up in canonic form by an augmentation in the basso continuo and treated with imitations in the four choral parts.¹⁴

In the first chorus of the cantata *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, the chorale melody, whose fragments have already appeared in the fugal weaving of voices, bursts forth from the instruments. It is stated first by the trumpet and oboe and reiterated a bar later by the orchestral basses along with the pedal organ, which, according to Bach’s indication, is to be played on the sixteen-foot trumpet rank of pipes.¹⁵ Presented in this way, Luther’s hymn-tune dominates and sustains the voices and orchestra. It surrounds them tightly, like a polished bronze mural mounted on an enormous base of imposing symmetry, and I do not know if we could find in all of music such a colossal representation of ordained power, fully bonded, unified, and fortified.

The Instruments Amplify the Vocal Motifs

The active role of the instrumental accompaniment and the talkative personality that Bach gives it are manifest with less intensity, but still clearly, in an infinite number of instances. “Hear God’s voice, ye peoples” sings the soprano in the cantata *Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes* (The heavens tell the glory of God), while, at each break in the intersected melody, the basso continuo obstinately repeats a short, even-structured figure mirroring the same motif that is sung (ex. 5.11a). We also find in Heinrich Schütz a passage whose dialogue reproduces the essence of this arrangement. Immediately after the soprano has said “When I look for the Lord, He answers me,” the instrumental bass plays the motif on which the soprano has just sung the words “He answers me.” It is easy to see the great similarity in construction between these two fragments (ex. 5.11b).

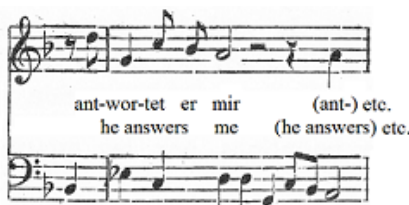
¹³ The German language also allows for a dual meaning of the word “folgen” (to follow, to comply) that explains very well the formation of similar images in both cases.

¹⁴ BWV 77/1, mm. 8–77.

¹⁵ BWV 80/1, mm. 23–31.



Ex. 5.11a. *Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes*, BWV 76/3, mm. 8–10.



Ex. 5.11b. Heinrich Schütz, *Kleine geistliche Concerte*, SWV 306/II, “Ich will den Herren loben allezeit,” mm. 34–35.

Sometimes, on the contrary, it is not the playing of the accompanimental bass but its silence that becomes meaningful. I have already pointed out this passage from the cantata *Brich dem Hungrigen dein Brot*, where the orchestra and the upper voices are silent and the choral basses—even deprived of any harmonic support from the organ—sing the words “If you see someone naked” before the rest of the chorus joins on the words “then clothe him.”¹⁶ Likewise, Bach interrupts the basso continuo to let the tenors alone declaim the word “bloss” (bare)—uncovered, and even set apart by some rests—so that the poverty is made more manifest.¹⁷ He uses a similar image for interpreting the words that begin the alto aria “Mouth and heart stand open to thee” in the cantata *Bringet dem Herrn Ehre seines Namens* (Bring to the Lord the glory of his name).¹⁸

He uses the same means to translate the idea of solitude in the bass aria of the cantata *Liebster Immanuel, Herzog der Frommen*.¹⁹

* * *

After studying these resources that have a special value when they are combined, if we examine the actual character of the motifs in the accompaniments, we find there, guided by some obvious analogies, the various categories of

¹⁶ BWV 39/1, mm. 94–96.

¹⁷ BWV 10, mm. 10–11.

¹⁸ BWV 148/4, mm. 16–19.

¹⁹ BWV 123/5, mm. 22–23.

meaningful themes that we have already established. But here in these instrumental motifs we see the themes amplified that the voices had difficulty expressing because they were created with intervals complicated by unusual harmonies and were prolonged beyond the average scope of the singers' breath. In the instruments, they now encompass every daring as they leap whole octaves in a single bound, plunge down or rise with a burst, string out in endless swirling garlands, stand steeply and fiercely on end without losing their footing and without taking a breath because they breathe with the organ's air, flee under the agile violin bows, and dissonantly clash against each other in the trumpets' sharp blasts and the oboes' bitter cries. Through the immense forest of sound from which he prophesies, Bach unleashes as he pleases these motifs that carry the message of his oracles whose implacable nature is sometimes revealed by the human voice. Master of this nearly limitless wealth of coloring and expression, he is much more free to obey his imagination and be entirely himself. Nowhere other than in his instrumental commentaries can we become more distinctly and more exclusively acquainted with the profundity, suppleness, and intensity that resound with the echo of his spirit.

The Joy of Bright Motifs

When transferred from voice to instruments, the meaning of all Bach's characteristic motifs is enhanced by being highlighted with greater intensity in order to compensate for what they lose from their immediate meaning when they are coupled with a text. As we have seen, the large consonant themes of joy or consolation spread themselves out broadly. For example, the accompaniment to the tenor aria from the second part of the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* includes some ample, climbing arpeggios on the major tonic chord that are also interspersed with dominant seventh arpeggios that doubly enhance—rather than detract from—the joyful feeling. Furthermore, this alternating between tonic and dominant is explained by the text “Rejoice, O soul; rejoice, O heart; Vanish now, care; disappear, thou sorrow!” (ex. 5.12).



Ex. 5.12. *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/10, mm. 8–18.

In the cantata *Siehe, ich will viel Fischer aussenden, spricht der Herr* (Behold, I will send out many fishermen, says the Lord), the basso continuo unfolds in a wonderful peacefulness on Jesus's words to Simon Peter "Fear thou not" (ex. 5.13a). These radiant arpeggios appear again at the beginning of the cantata *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen* (ex. 5.13b) and in the tenor and alto duet from the cantata *Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende* (ex. 5.13c).



Ex. 5.13a. *Siehe, ich will viel Fischer aussenden*, BWV 88/4, mm. 4–7.



Ex. 5.13b. *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen*, BWV 51/1, mm. 1–2.



Ex. 5.13c. *Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende*, BWV 28/5, mm. 3–4.

Less expansive, these simple arpeggios speak to us of a satisfaction agreeing with the texts celebrating the tranquility of hearts that are purified and blest. In the cantata *Ach, Herr, mich armen Sünder*, the orchestral bass expresses—through its expansive serenity—the comfort already found in the soul's imploring prayer. As the tenor beseeches Jesus to console him, the continuo unfurls a slow melodic line of calming charm that repeats some simple intervals in an even, rocking motion (ex. 5.14).

Trö - ste mir Je - su, mein Ge - mü - the
Comfort O Jesus, my spirit

Ex. 5.14. *Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder*, BWV 135/3, mm. 17–21.

A similar accompaniment appears in the soprano and alto duet from the cantata *Erwünschtes Freudenlicht* that invites the Christians—Jesus’s “happy flock”—to show him their gratitude (ex. 5.15).

Ge-seg - ne - te Christen, glück - se - li - ge Heerde, kommt stelt euch bei Je-su
O blessed Christians, happy flock, come present yourselves before Jesus

Ex. 5.15. *Erwünschtes Freudenlicht*, BWV 184/2, mm. 32–38.

In the *Christmas Oratorio*, the basso continuo plays the same type of arpeggios at the end of the recitative preceding the celebrated lullaby borrowed from the secular cantata *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege* (Hercules at the crossroads). The evangelist’s words are “Then sing to him at his cradle in a soft voice . . . this lullaby!”²⁰

In the bass and violins in the cantata *Gott fähret auf mit Jauchzen* (ex. 5.16a), these bright themes ring out like fanfares for the coming of the “hero of heroes” They exult in the tenor aria with trumpet from the cantata *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen* (You will weep and wail) at the words “Leave off your sorrowful undertakings” (ex. 5.16.b), and they bound about in the tenor aria with flute from the cantata *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele* (Adorn thyself, O dear soul), where the singer cries out “Rouse thyself, thy Savior knocks; Ah, open thy heart’s door quickly!” (ex. 5.16c).

Gott fähret auf mit Jauchzen

Ex. 5.16a. *Gott fähret auf mit Jauchzen*, BWV 43/6, mm. 1–2.

²⁰ BWV 248/9, mm. 1–9. We can cite here again a persistent accompanimental figure for the trumpet at the beginning of the chorus “The Lord has done good to us, for this we are all joyful” in the cantata *Preise, Jerusalem, den Herrn* (BWV 119/7, mm. 2–4). Here, as in the preceding examples, Bach meaningfully employs accompaniments of broken chords whose use was to become so common in the 18th century under the name of “Alberti bass.”



Ex. 5.16b. *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen*, BWV 103/5, m. 1.



Ex. 5.16c. *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele*, BWV 180/2, mm. 1–2.²¹

As in these last examples, the octave leaps in the basso continuo often add a kind of rugged, abrupt, and slightly heavy gaiety to Bach's portrayal of exultant joy that makes one think of a happy foot-soldier's dance. In these leaps there is a superabundance of vigor and expansiveness—something folk-like that we experience and that carries us along. Bach uses it frequently in the large choruses and in the jubilant arias where these powerful motifs seem to exhilarate the orchestra and voices. We can see it in the first chorus of the cantata *Freue dich, erlöste Schar* (Rejoice, O redeemed throng)²² and in the cantata *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen* (Praise God in his realms).²³ The same rockings in the bass highlight the beats in the opening choruses based on words of praise and exaltation in the cantatas *Auf Christi Himmelfahrt allein* (Upon Christ's ascension alone),²⁴ *Gelobet sei der Herr, mein Gott*,²⁵ and *Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir*.²⁶ And they appear again in the aria that celebrates the aged Simeon's joy at the end of the cantata *Ich habe genug* and in the accompaniment to those same words in the soprano and tenor duet from the cantata *Ich lebe, mein Herze, zu deinem Ergötzen* (I live, O my dear heart, to thy delight) (ex. 5.17a). Lastly, I cite their use in the

²¹ Let us note here again the arpeggios in the basso continuo of the bass aria in the cantata *Unser Mund sei voll Lachens* (BWV 110/6, mm. 1–9). This aria begins with the words "Wake up," etc.

²² BWV 30/1, mm. 3–18.

²³ BWV 11/1, mm. 32–36.

²⁴ BWV 128/1, mm. 1–2.

²⁵ BWV 129/1, mm. 1–3.

²⁶ BWV 130/1, mm. 1–3.

alto and tenor duet from the cantata *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*, whose text begins “Well for me! Jesus is found. Now I am no longer saddened” (ex. 5.17b).

Tenor *Soprano*

Ich le-be, mein Herze, zu dei-nem Er-götzen, Du le-best, mein Jesu
 I live, O my dear heart, to thy delight, Thou livest, my Jesus

Ex. 5.17a. *Ich lebe, mein Herze, zu deinem Ergötzen*, BWV 145/1, mm. 16–22.

Alto and Tenor

Wohl mir, Jesus ist ge-fun-den, nun bin Ich nicht mehr be-trübt
 Well for me! Jesus is found, now am I no longer saddened

Ex. 5.17b. *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*, BWV 154/7, mm. 7–9.

* * *

Chromatic Themes

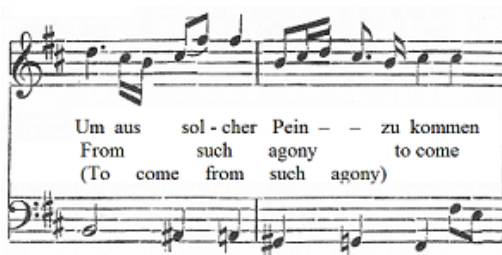
Just like the motifs of joy, the themes of sorrow maintain their recognizable physiognomy in the instrumental parts. The absence of words never deprives them of meaning—a meaning that remains constant.

The most typical of these motifs—the descending chromatic sequence—retains its character of despairing moan in the orchestra. I have already pointed out its frequent use in 17th-century declamatory singing,²⁷ and the composers of this period have also found it to be a profoundly expressive accompanimental motif whose meaning is as recognizable when played on instruments as it is when voices

²⁷ See examples 2.47a–c.

unite it with words of distress. As early as 1608, Monteverdi knew how to join this moaning and drooping commentary to Orpheus's plaint,²⁸ and Giacomo Carissimi used it to express Ezechias's wail in telling of death's horror.²⁹ In the opera *Paride*, Bontempi repeats it obstinately in Ermillo's aria "My sad breast is already pierced . . . what help will heaven give me?"³⁰

This motif is also common in early German works such as the aria "Um aus solcher Pein zu kommen" (To come from such pain) in the opera *Vespasian* (1681), where Johann Wolfgang Franck lays it out from the very first notes (ex. 5.18a). In Johann Fischer's collection *Himmlische Seelen-Lust* (1686), he unites its ruthless continuity with the singer's broken discourse alluding to the detestable bite of desire: "but it consumes itself" (ex. 5.18b).



Ex. 5.18a. Johann Wolfgang Franck, *Vespasian*, aria 16, mm. 1–2.



Ex. 5.18b. Johann Fischer, *Himmlische Seelen-Lust*, "Madrigale tertium," mm. 31–33.

When Bach cannot or does not wish to have this disturbed and anguished phrase declaimed by the singers' voices, the instruments express its grave

²⁸ Claudio Monteverdi, *Orfeo* (Venice: Ricciardo Amadino, 1604), act 3, on these words: "Ahi chi nega il si conforto alle mie pene?" (Ah, who would deny me my pain?).

²⁹ *Concerts spirituels*, ed. Schola Cantorum, 1:1.

³⁰ This opera was performed in Dresden in 1662. The passage that I am referring to is cited by Wilhelm Tappert in his *Musikalische Schriften* (Berlin: 1868), 80.

bitterness or pour out its lengthy wail. If he holds himself faithful to a chorale melody out of respect for its hallowed message by at least not making it unrecognizable, he will not, however, give up extricating what he feels to be the emotion contained in its verses whose text and music he borrows. It is then that he takes recourse to the orchestra, and through this intermediary deprived of speech—but not of language—he addresses his listeners, asking their forgiveness and being certain that they will understand this instrumental moaning because it is familiar to them from being rendered so many times before in vocal motifs.

This occurs in the cantata *Christ lag in Todes Banden*. But before it appears to the faithful in Luther's powerful poetic imagery, they are already prepared by the sorrowful and concise melody in the basso continuo that represents "the proper Easter lamb . . . broiled in hot love high on the cross's trunk."³¹ In the accompaniment to the chorale "Christ, thou Lamb of God. Thou who dost bear the sins of the world" at the end of the cantata *Du wahrer Gott und Davids Sohn* (Thou true God and David's son), the oboes likewise state the motif of the bloody redemption.³² And this motif is also insistently repeated in the "Crucifixus" of the *Mass in B Minor*,³³ in which Bach merely adapts the Latin text to the first chorus of the cantata *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* (Weeping, wailing, worrying, fearing): "Weeping, wailing, worrying, fearing, anguish and need are the Christian's bread of tears, those who bear the sign of Jesus."³⁴ This use of the same source for the two choruses is quite justified by the intimate harmony of feelings and allusions they contain, since the memory of Christ's crucifixion is revived in each of them—the symbol of sorrow, and the unceasing source of affliction for the penitent Christian.

Considered to be a generally accepted theme of sadness, the descending chromatic sequence appears again in the accompaniment of the bass recitative with chorus in the cantata *Was frag ich nach der Welt* for the preoccupation that obsesses the world jealous of fame and uneasy with its glory.³⁵ In the alto recitative from the cantata *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*, the same melodic formula is stated by the orchestral bass on held notes associated with the words "Ah yes! So come back soon."³⁶

We meet a variation of this motif imitating the vocal line in the duet with chorale from the cantata *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren* in the verse "He remembers his mercy" (ex. 5.19a). The match is also reflected in the instrumentation of a passage corresponding to the text "In Jesus's loneliness can I find comfort, in his poverty, riches" in the alto aria from the cantata *Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kommt* (O sweet comfort, my Jesus comes) (ex. 5.19b).

³¹ BWV 4/1/V, mm. 1–3.

³² BWV 23/4, mm. 16–18.

³³ BWV 232/17, mm. 1–12.

³⁴ BWV 12/1, mm. 1–12.

³⁵ BWV 94/5, mm. 1–6.

³⁶ BWV 11/7b, mm. 1–6.



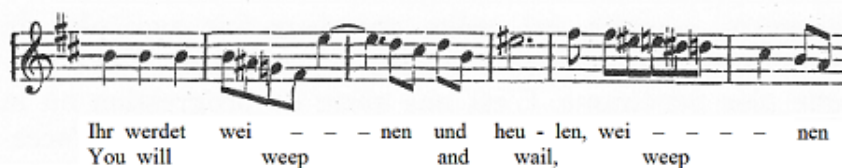
Ex. 5.19a. *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren*, BWV 10/5, mm. 1–5.



Ex. 5.19b. *Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kommt*, BWV 151/3, mm. 13–16.

The Motif of Tears

Bach's use of chromatic themes in the vocal parts has already familiarized us with all these interpretations, and now it remains for us to consider them in a more particular instrumental function that is no longer entirely symbolic but is still imitative up to a certain point. I am referring here to the use of pitches for directly representin crying mingled with sobs and fretful tears. His intention is well determined, and we find the theme rendered clearly in this phrase for tenor at the beginning of the cantata *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen* (ex. 5.20):



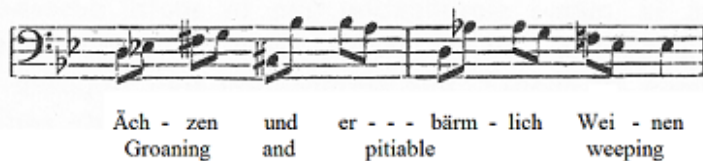
Ex. 5.20. *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen*, BWV 103/1, mm. 27–32.

One measure ahead of the voice, the flute has already played the same chromatic sequence; so, here the instrumental interpretation is instantly made clear by the vocal part. In other works the meaning of the instrumental motif is just as certain, even if it does not serve to adorn the word itself. Without there being a direct association, the text indicates with certainty the exact value of the instrumental motif. In the same vein, the violin begins a descent by half-steps, in the cantata *Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen* (My sighs, my tears), at the very moment the bass pronounces the last word of the clause “Groaning and pitiable weeping . . .” (ex. 5.21).



Ex. 5.21. *Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen*, BWV 13/5, mm. 10–16.

The vocal melody only has several notes in common with this instrumental phrase whose chromatic subject is not only stated but repeated and varied, and these notes sung out by the bass are themselves taken from where the motif in the voice is less obvious and less fully formulated (ex. 5.22).



Ex. 5.22. *Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen*, BWV 13/5, mm. 9–10.

However, it is easy to recognize the expressive origin of this instrumental development where the phrase, clearly stated at first, is repeated twice with more disorder and less distinctly in each renewal but is more penetrating musically. It is a type of progression where the motif of tears is gradually heightened and passes from despondency to desperate agitation.

In the *St. John Passion*, the ascending chromatic motif is joined to the descending one to express Peter's desolation and tears after his denial of knowing Christ. While the evangelist sings a heart-rending vocal line to a jolting rhythm, the basso continuo successively unfurls the two themes without stopping its uniform stride. Bach again mixes allegory and realism in this passage, and the long-standing moan that has so often told of Christ's death and the threat of Hades accompanies the sinner's tearful voice here. This voice is deeply moved, disturbed to the point of strife, and full of uncertainties and failures (ex. 5.23).

Tenor

und wei - - - - - nete bi - ter - lich, und wei -
and wept bitterly, and wept

- - - - - ne - te bit - - - - - ter - lich
bitterly

Ex. 5.23. *St. John Passion*, BWV 245/I/12c, mm. 11–16.

On the contrary, the ascending chromatic motif used in this recitative to express the same meaning as the descending motif sometimes assumes, in the basso continuo, a quite opposite meaning to the voice part. Instead of speaking of downfall, it speaks of redemption. Two other examples come to mind where Bach wants this gradual rising to represent the slow and energetic step by which we climb, little by little, to attain the luminous and peaceful peaks above regions shrouded in sorrow.

One of these examples is taken from the cantata *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*. At the end of the bass recitative when the singer finishes the climbing chromatic sequence on the word “Jammerthal” (vale of tears), the instrumental bass undertakes the same arduous journey—without pursuing it as long, it is true, but long enough for Bach’s intention to be declared clearly. These few notes, in effect, intervene so as to renew the vocal effort and to help sustain it to the end of its labor. The bass’s notes follow the same route as the voice, and, in a way, carry the voice into its final flight.³⁷

Secondly, we must point out a passage in the alto aria from the cantata *Gott führet auf mit Jauchzen*: “I see already in the spirit how he, at God’s right hand, hurls judgment upon his enemies to help his servants out of wretchedness, distress, and humiliation.” When the singer pronounces the words I have emphasized, the orchestral bass heavily accentuates the ascending chromatic sequence, playing it in eighth notes linked two by two. Stated in this way, the motif rises with difficulty, as if it were weighed down by the lowest note in each rhythmic grouping. The imagery is reinforced by this detail: Bach not only depicts the elevation of the soul toward serene heights, but he also intends to express that

³⁷ BWV 91/4, mm. 11–12.

the quagmire “of wretchedness, distress, and humiliation” restrains its prey, which can only be rescued with difficulty through help from the Almighty.³⁸


* * *

Rhythms in the Accompaniment: Calm

Just as with the melodic motifs, the instrumental rhythmic motifs are explained to us by the texts they accompany and by the vocal formulas with the same structure that we have already studied. We find again here some of the very simple and familiar images. A long, held note in the continuo expresses the idea of a heavy and continual sleep in the tenor recitative from the cantata *Ich bin ein guter Hirt* (I am a good shepherd) when the singer says “While the hirelings sleep . . .”³⁹

In the cantata *Ich habe meine Zuversicht* (I have my confidence), the string section, previously trembling and tumultuous, opens out into a broad harmony at the soprano’s words “God, however, remains evermore.”⁴⁰

In the chorale from the cantata *Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht mit deinem Knecht*, the accompaniment is agitated at first, then it abates little by little while the choir sings “Now, I know, thou wilt still my conscience, which plagues me.” Right at the beginning, the violins and violas quiver in repeated sixteenth notes, and then they take on a gentler triplet rhythm that slows down to quarter notes. From there, the instrumental rhythm becomes languid again in ternary groupings

whose first two sets are connected  and are followed by even quarter notes that finally steady themselves in a half note that heralds the whole-note fermata on which the motion dies out altogether.⁴¹ The expressive means that Bach employs here to represent this return to tranquility by passing from the quivering of rapid notes to the calmness of slowing notes belongs solely to the orchestra.

Tumult

In all of Bach’s works, we could not find a better example than this of rhythmic progression whose symbol is so complete and whose sequencing is so perfectly managed. But he very often uses particular elements of this slackening series elsewhere. For example, the trembling of sixteenth notes appears in the

³⁸ BWV 43/9, mm. 57–58.

³⁹ BWV 85/4, mm. 1–3.

⁴⁰ BWV 188/5, mm. 4–5.

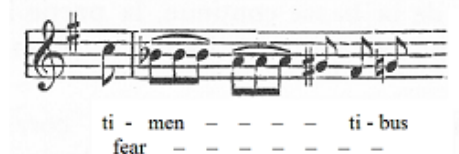
⁴¹ BWV 105/6, mm. 1–24.

same cantata (*Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht*) during the entire soprano aria “How the sinner’s thoughts do tremble and vacillate . . .” The first and second violins never cease to give the aria images of uncertainty and disorder through their repeated sixteenth note chords, and this wavering does not even have the deep support of the basso continuo, since the lowest part of the accompaniment is played by the violas in a steadily pulsing motion.⁴²

In the *St. Matthew Passion*, the persistent shaking in the orchestral bass corresponds to the words “O pain, here trembles the tortured heart.”⁴³ In the cantata *Ich liebe den Höchsten von ganzem Gemüte* (I love the Most High with all my heart), the strings likewise interpret this phrase of the tenor recitative with a very brief *tremolo*: “The very gates of hell tremble before this mighty banner.”⁴⁴ A similar quivering from the string section illustrates the words in the *Christmas Oratorio* “Why are you frightened? Can my Jesus’s presence awaken such fear in you?”⁴⁵ When the bass evokes God’s terrible sentence and the curse of the damned in harsh terms, a blast of terror convulses the orchestra with intermittent shudders in the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele*.⁴⁶

In a composition by Martinus Colerus, we encounter the same thing with the basso continuo’s repeated notes in accompanying the words “I fear not.”⁴⁷ Perhaps there is great psychological finesse in this seeming simplicity, for this agitation that seems to contradict the singer’s words gives the obscure master’s work a presentiment of Glück’s famous aria “Calm returns to my heart.”⁴⁸

Bach also happens to write for the voice this trembling effect that usually only occurs in the orchestra. In the *Magnificat*, on the word “timentibus” (fear), instead of sustaining the notes, the tenor repeats them as if he were shaking with terror in the verse “Et in misericordia ejus” (And his mercy) (ex. 5.24).



Ex. 5.24. *Magnificat*, BWV 243/6, mm. 30–31.⁴⁹

⁴² BWV 105/3, mm. 1–9.

⁴³ BWV 244/25, mm. 1–5.

⁴⁴ BWV 174/3, m. 14.

⁴⁵ BWV 248/49, mm. 1–8.

⁴⁶ BWV 78/5, mm. 7–10.

⁴⁷ I cite Colerus (Köhler) according to the collection no. 2 by Sébastien de Brossard already pointed out in chapter 2. “Motets” (untitled), *Exercitia vocis* (A. Schop, 1667), 1:997.

⁴⁸ Christoph Willibald Glück, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1778. II/3, mm. 22–30.


⁴⁹ See also the trembling notes on the word “Tränen” (tears) in the first chorus of the *Trauer-Ode* (BWV 198/1, mm. 63–64).

Again, it is the descriptiveness of 17th-century composers that we find here. Lully uses the same figure in the chorus of “tremblers” in *Isis*,⁵⁰ and Henry Purcell uses it in the “frost scene” from his opera *King Arthur*.⁵¹

This image also appears in its instrumental form in the first recitative from the cantata *Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbaths* (However, on the evening of the same Sabbath) where the orchestral bass quivers on the same note while the tenor sings the words from the Gospel of John “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in their midst” (John 20:19).⁵²

This motif has a double meaning here. On one hand, the allusion to the disciples’ fear is obvious.⁵³ On the other hand, for Bach, the repeated notes in one of the orchestral parts also represent the steady sadness of somber twilights. The monotonous notes pour themselves out with the melancholy of a rain draining away drop by drop. They create a grey and misty mood that spreads like a fog. In the first chorus from the cantata *Bleib bei uns*, the continual murmuring of the upper strings [alternating with the oboes.—Trans.] darkens the entire movement, and one might say that the whole chorus is covered by an elusive and oppressive veil. Within this low and vague whispering, the precision of the themes and rhythms seems to dissolve, fusing the mixture of voices and instruments so that all their individual qualities are absorbed into the muted persistence of this shapeless and incessant throbbing.⁵⁴

Meaning of Accompaniments Formed from Repeated Notes: Realistic Images

The bleak and continuous undulation of the orchestral bass also represents the long darkness of the soul deprived of its divine radiance. For nearly twelve measures in the cantata *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange?*, the continuo repeats the same pitch on barely distinguishable eighth notes,  while the soprano declaims “My God, how long, ah, how long? There is too much misery! I see absolutely no end to my suffering and sorrow. Thy sweet look of grace hath hidden itself beneath night and clouds . . . etc.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, this rhythmic formula is so close to immobility that Bach uses it to represent the idea of calm. In the cantata *Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille* (God,

⁵⁰ Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Isis* (1677), IV/1, mm. 1–118 (chorus of people from icy climes).

⁵¹ Purcell, *Orpheus Britannicus, a Collection of all the choicest Songs for one, two and three Voices, compos'd by Mr. Henry Purcell* (London: 1706), 1: 275, mm. 1–12.

⁵² BWV 42/2, mm. 1–6.

⁵³ BWV 42/2, mm. 1–6.

⁵⁴ BWV 6/1, mm. 1–15 et seq.

⁵⁵ BWV 155/1, mm. 1–12.

one praises thee in the stillness), repeated sixteenth-note groupings appear in the orchestral bass to accompany the alto aria “God, one praises thee.”⁵⁶

Symbols of Uniformity and Lethargy

The same image of quietude rules the accompaniments of a great number of recitatives, arias, and choruses whose texts speak of repose or sleep. Under the long, held note where the voice opens out in pronouncing the word “Ruh” (rest) in the tenor aria from the cantata *Schau, lieber Gott*, which Spitta supposes to have been written for the first Sunday of the year 1724, the basso continuo, previously intense and tempestuous, slows down into pairs of repeated eighth notes (ex. 5.25a). In the first aria of the secular cantata *Ich bin in mir vergnügt*, the accompaniment also gently undulates for describing the peace of a modest life without ambition (ex. 5.25b).

Tenor

mei - ne Ruh' - - - -
my rest - - -

Ex. 5.25a. *Schau, lieber Gott*, BWV 153/6, mm. 22–24.

Soprano

Ru - hig und mit sich zu - - frieden
Calm and with yourself happy
(Calm and happy with yourself)

Ex. 5.25b. *Ich bin in mir vergnügt*, BWV 204/2, mm. 13–16.

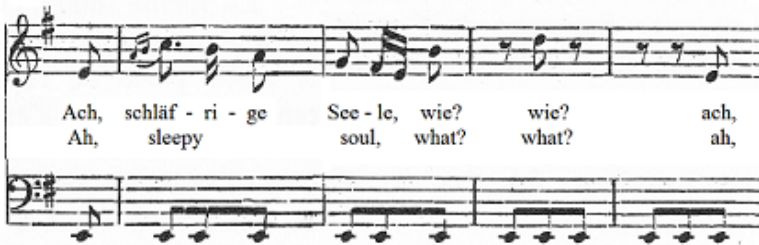
⁵⁶ BWV 120/1, mm. 1–6 et seq.

Motifs of Sleep

At the beginning of the cantata *Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen*, the orchestral bass part is comprised of repeated pitches while the alto sings “Jesus sleeps” (ex. 5.26a). And Bach uses the same rhythmic figure in the alto aria of the cantata *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*. This aria begins with the words “Ah sleepy soul, what? Do you still rest?” (ex. 5.26b).



Ex. 5.26a. *Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen*, BWV 81/1, mm. 9–10.



Ex. 5.26b. *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*, BWV 115/2, mm. 32–36.

The bass sways peacefully on octave intervals in the aria that Wollust (Voluptuousness) sings to put the young Hercules to sleep in the cantata *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege* (1733) (ex. 5.27a). In the alto aria from the wedding cantata *Gott ist unsre Zuversicht* (God is our confidence), the bass has some continual octave leaps whose balanced swaying back and forth is sustained by pairs of repeated eighth notes (ex. 5.27b).



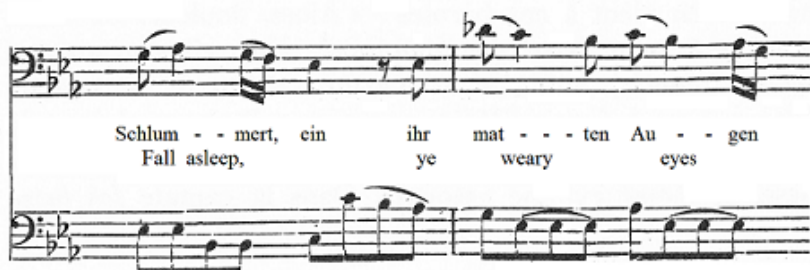
Ex. 5.27a. *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege*, BWV 213/3, mm. 28–32.



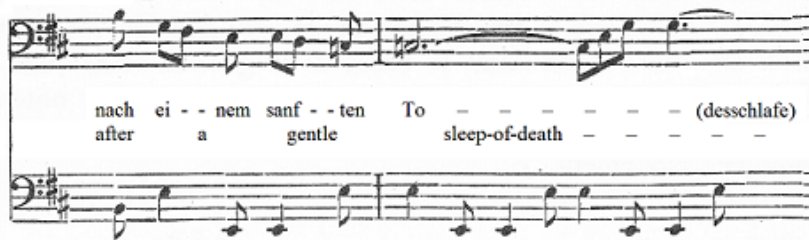
Ex. 5.27b. *Gott ist unsre Zuversicht*, BWV 197/3, mm. 24–26.

Peace and Death

The same rhythmic forms abound in the accompaniment to the second aria from the cantata *Ich habe genug*, where Bach sings exultantly of the repose of our last sleep (ex. 5.28a). We also see its application in the bass aria from the cantata *Du Hirte Israëel, höre* (Thou shepherd of Israel, hear us), where we find the words “And hope yet for faith’s compensation after a gentle sleep of death” (ex. 5.28b).



Ex. 5.28a. *Ich habe genug*, BWV 82/3, mm. 10–11.



Ex. 5.28b. *Du Hirte Israë! höre*, BWV 104/5, mm. 37–38.

Through this process, the master renews an image in his works that is close to the hearts of the living. Luther says, in his hymn *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin*, “Death has become sleep for me;” and another poet sings “Come, O sweet death, brother of sleep.”⁵⁷ In Bach’s cantatas, we encounter a large number of examples revealing that this union of thoughts was close to his heart. Very often in the orchestra, the motifs with a slumbering cadence cradle the singing about death.

In a work from his youth, in which Bach celebrates the delights of our final hour with a melody of a slightly veiled cheerfulness that befits the wedding song of the soul freed from life, the basso continuo drones on in repeated notes while the chorus of altos, tenors, and basses slowly sings “Man, thou must die,” and then, on an ecstatic melisma, the soprano murmurs “Yes, come, Lord Jesus!”⁵⁸ In the third verse of the chorale *Christ lag in Todes Banden*, when the tenor sings “Thus nothing remains but death’s form,” the orchestral bass line is written according to the same procedure.⁵⁹ And it occurs again this way in the bass aria from the cantata *Herr, wie du willst* (Lord, as thou wilt) when the singer comes to the words “then, ye pangs of death, press these groans out of my heart.”⁶⁰ An allusion to the word “sterben” (to die) is all that is needed in the alto arioso from the cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*, for Bach to employ the same lulling rhythm in the bass part.⁶¹ When the bass evokes “gentle death” in the cantata *Ich lasse dich nicht* (I relinquish thee not)—sung in the church at Pomssen at the funeral service for Johann Christoph von Ponickau senior, 6 February 1727—the accompaniment slows down to calm, repeated notes.⁶² The same rhythmic formula is sketched at the end of the alto and tenor duo in the cantata *Ein feste Burg*,⁶³ and we meet it

⁵⁷ Johann Franck (1618–77), in the chorale *Du, schönes Weltgebäude*.

⁵⁸ BWV 106/2d, mm. 50–54.

⁵⁹ BWV 4/4, mm. 25–28.

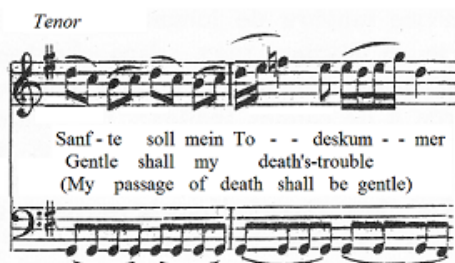
⁶⁰ BWV 73/4, mm. 13–20.

⁶¹ BWV 72/2a, mm. 52–56.

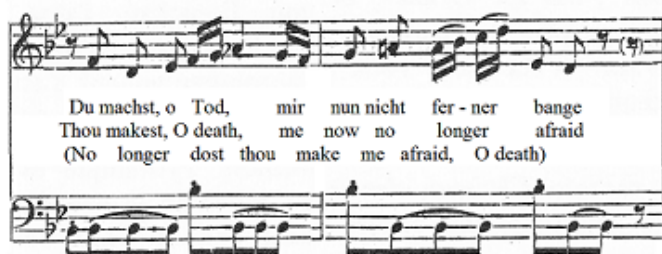
⁶² BWV 157/4, mm. 82–85. The date is given by Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:243.

⁶³ BWV 80/7, mm. 86–90.

again in the aria where the alto hails welcomed death in advance.⁶⁴ It is joined with the word “sterben” in the alto aria from the cantata *Ich steh mit einem Fuss in Grabe*,⁶⁵ and, in the cantata *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen* (Rejoice, ye hearts), it appears once more when the tenor quotes the Savior’s words “My grave and dying bring you life.”⁶⁶ While the choir sustains long chords on the word “sterben” in the cantata *Christus, der ist mein Leben* (Christ, he is my life), the instrumental bass accompanies it with its solemn pulsings.⁶⁷ The same rhythm floats in the accompaniment to the tenor aria in the *Easter Oratorio* “My passage of death shall be gentle, only a slumber, O Jesus, through thy shroud” (ex. 5.29a). In the alto aria from the cantata *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost* (ex. 5.29b), in the bass recitative from the cantata *Ich freue mich in dir* (I rejoice in thee) (ex. 5.29c), and in the soprano aria from the cantata *Selig ist der Mann* (Blessed is the man) (ex. 5.29d), the same uniformity of movement governs the basso continuo when the text speaks of dying. To sum up all these citations, it suffices to give some excerpts from these last works. The different aspects of the motif appear so distinctly in them that they can spare us from quoting other examples.



Ex. 5.29a. *Easter Oratorio*, BWV 249/7, mm. 13–14.



Ex. 5.29b. *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*, BWV 114/5, mm. 9–10.

⁶⁴ BWV 27/3, mm. 16–24.

⁶⁵ BWV 156/4, mm. 37–39.

⁶⁶ BWV 66/4, mm. 12–14.

⁶⁷ BWV 95/1, mm. 21–26.

uniform notes by both voice and instruments to interpret the words from Psalm 127 “Cum dederit dilectis suis somnum” (“He giveth his beloved sleep”).⁷¹ Handel puts repeated chords in the orchestra of an aria from the opera *Almira*, performed in Hamburg on 8 January 1705. The aria begins with the words “Fernando stirbet dein” (Fernando dies yours). [Fernando is telling Almira that he will love her until he dies.—Trans.]⁷² And the same year, in the same theatre, Reinhard Keiser produced an aria with a similarly rhythmized accompaniment in the opera *Octavia* that begins: “Ruhig sein” (“Be peaceful”).⁷³ Keiser already briefly used these same orchestral pulsings in the aria “Entschlaft, ihr Sinnen” (Go away, you thoughts) that Clotilde sings in the opera *La Forza della virtù* (The power of virtue) (1700),⁷⁴ and Wilderer also writes some separated repeated notes in the bass to accompany the long notes held by the voice on the word “dormi” (sleep).⁷⁵

Disjointed Rhythms, Rhythms of Heaviness

Varying orchestral rhythms occur again in this meaningful way in the course of the tenor aria in Bach’s cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele*. When the singer says “The blood, that washes away my guilt makes my heart light again,” the instrumental bass assumes a quiet pace for several measures on these last words. Some groups of repeated notes in threes, whose first is accented to give a momentum to the other two, gently propel themselves there (ex. 5.30a). The brief soaring of a bird that tries out its skill for flying, shakes its wings, advances a little, rests, and then rises again is described in the accompaniment of the bass aria “Faith provides the soul with wings” from the cantata *Wer da glaubet und getauft wird* (Whoever believes and is baptized) (ex. 5.30b). Elsewhere, in the duet from the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, the insecure stride portrayed unevenly by the cellos corresponds to the text “We hasten with weak, yet eager steps” (ex. 5.30c).

⁷¹ Franz Tunder, *Gesangswerke*, ed. Seiffert, *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst* (1900), series 1, 3:36. See also pp. 102 and 105 where one finds the idea of death’s sleep evoked.

⁷² HWV 1/III/8, mm. 5–10.

⁷³ Keiser, *Octavia in Componimenti musicali* (Hamburg: 1706), 5, mm. 1–15.

⁷⁴ I owe this note to the obliging kindness of Dr. Hugo Leichtentritt, who very much wished to communicate to me a fragment of the scene that I am citing. Furthermore, he points out this aria in his interesting work entitled *Reinhard Keiser in seinen Opern* (Berlin: 1901).

⁷⁵ Johann Hugo Wilderer, *Modulationi sacre a due, tre, e quattro Voci e Violini*, Amsterdam: (no date). In his collection *Musicalische Sonn- und Fest-Tags-Lust* (Sondershausen: 1698), N. Niedt similarly interprets “schlummern” (slumber) in the vocal part (fourth Sunday after Epiphany).

Tenor

macht mir das Her-ze wie - der leicht
 makes my heart again light
 (makes my heart light again)

The image shows a musical score for a Tenor part. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

Ex. 5.30a. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/4, mm. 21–22.

Der Glaube schafft der Seele Flügel
 Faith provides the soul with wings

The image shows a musical score for a Bass part. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

Ex. 5.30b. *Wer da glaubet und getauft wird*, BWV 37/5, mm. 6–9.

Wir ei - - - - - len mit
 We hasten - - - - - with

The image shows a musical score for a Bass part. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

Ex. 5.30c. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/2, mm. 8–10.

We also find in the accompaniments the distorted and ponderous rhythmic motif of repeated notes with the distinct meaning of weakness, dejection, and overwhelming fatigue that we studied in an earlier chapter. In the first aria from the cantata *Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen* (I will gladly bear the cross), the instruments repeat and continually develop the theme of weariness that the singer states on the word “tragen” (carry).⁷⁶ In the *Christmas Oratorio* the orchestral bass continues with this same rhythmic conformation in the motif accompanying the words “He is come to earth poor” (ex. 5.31).

⁷⁶ BWV 56/1, mm. 20–27. See examples 3.12a, b.

Er ist auf Er - - den kommen arm - - - - -
 He is upon earth come poor - - - - -
 (He has come upon earth poor)

Ex. 5.31. *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/7, mm. 12–17.

In the cantata *Selig ist der Mann*, the melodic line in the violins has the same hesitant pace when they accompany the soprano aria “I would wish death for myself if thou, my Jesus, didst not love me” (ex. 5.32a). Words of supplication in the *Christmas Oratorio* are joined to a similarly structured bass (ex. 5.32b).

Ex. 5.32a. *Selig ist der Mann*, BWV 57/3, mm. 1–8.

Ex. 5.32b. *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/61, mm. 18–21.

Syncopated themes also reappear in the orchestra with all their expressive value. In the first aria from the cantata *Ich steh mit einem Fuss in Grabe*, a staggering bass line depicts the body borne toward the grave (ex. 5.33a). And, in both the orchestra and the vocal part of the cantata *Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*, a stumbling motif is linked with the words “How fearfully my steps waver” (ex. 5.33b).

Ex. 5.33a. *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe*, BWV 156/2, mm. 1–3.



Ex. 5.33b. *Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*, BWV 33/3, mm. 1–3.

Description of Movement

The stately energy of dotted motifs is also just as clearly characterized in the accompaniments as in the singing. For instance, in the introduction to the duo aria in the cantata *Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit* the first violins announce the powerfully rhythmized theme that the voices sing on the words “So I walk with emboldened steps, even if God does lead me to the grave.” In addition, the vigorous rhythmic cadence is stubbornly emphasized by the orchestral bass. Here is a sketch of the first part of this introduction (ex. 5.34):

Ex. 5.34. *Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit*, BWV 111/4, mm. 1–8.

At the beginning of the cantata *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid II*, the instruments already inform us that, in accepting the afflictions “of the narrow way,” the Christian walks on “the path to blessedness.” We have seen above (Exs. 3.15, 3.16) that Bach has these words sung on a motif with an accented rhythm. Here, the short orchestral prelude and the entire following accompaniment have the same determined gait. But from the first notes in the bass, the theme of patient



Ex. 5.36a. *Christ lag in Todes Banden*, BWV 4/7, mm. 1–3.



Ex. 5.36b. *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland I*, BWV 61/1, mm. 1–2.

As for the rhythms bounding with joy—whose meaning we established in the vocal parts—the orchestra unleashes and amplifies them inexhaustibly. An exultant instrumental bass opens out in large, cheerful phrases in the duet from the cantata *Ach, ich sehe, itzt, da ich zur Hochzeit gehe* while the voices repeat “In my God I am made glad!” (ex. 5.37).



Ex. 5.37. *Ach, ich sehe, itzt, da ich zur Hochzeit gehe*, 162/5, mm. 13–18.

Philipp Spitta, who dates this cantata from the twentieth Sunday after Trinity (3 November of the year 1715),⁸⁰ reckons that this duet opens up a domain until then unknown to us. “One would be tempted to find in it,” he says, “something of a Dionysian jubilation, when the voices bound in sixteenth notes and sometimes resound in long cries of joy, while the bass seems to be playing for a grandiose dance.”⁸¹ In the bass aria from the cantata *Wer mich liebet, der wird mein Wort halten I* (Whoever loves me, he will keep my word), which was undoubtedly composed for Pentecost Sunday in 1716,⁸² the basso continuo similarly unfurls itself with ease and splendor under the words “The world with all its glory cannot equal this glory, wherewith our God gladdens us: that he enthrones himself in our hearts and dwells there as in heaven” (ex. 5.38).

⁸⁰ [The first performance of this cantata was 10 October 1716 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 263.—Trans.]

⁸¹ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:547.

⁸² [The first performance of this cantata was possibly 16 May 1723 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 258.—Trans.]



Ex. 5.38. *Wer mich liebet, der wird mein Wort halten I*, BWV 59/4, mm. 1–4.

In the duet from the cantata *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*, which I have cited above (ex. 2.12b), the bass has an analogous, though less continuous, movement,⁸³ and it carries along with the same rhythm at the beginning of the tenor aria in the cantata *Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht*: “If I can but make Jesus my friend, then Mammon means nothing to me.”⁸⁴

The verse “Et exultavit spiritus meus” (And my spirit rejoices) from the *Magnificat* is accompanied by an impetuous bass that seems to bound,⁸⁵ and the previously cited flute motif that accompanies the tenor aria from the cantata *Scmücke dich, o liebe Seele* is briskly cadenced along with the same rhythm of joy in the continuo.⁸⁶

Next to the descending chromatic motif in the first chorus from the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele* that recalls Jesus’s death, the rhythmic motif formed from an eighth and two sixteenth notes (♪♪♪) tells of the reward for the sacrifice that has “forcefully torn the soul out of the devil’s dark cavern.”⁸⁷

The same motif agitates us in the first chorus from the cantata *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren* (ex. 5.39a), and a similar rhythm in the first chorus from the cantata *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen* contrasts the moaning of the faithful with the joy of the godless “you will weep and wail, but the world will rejoice” (ex. 5.39b). We also find a nearly identical formula in the accompaniment of the first chorus from the cantata *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland II* (Now come O thou the Gentiles’ Savior II) (ex. 5.39c).



Ex. 5.39a. *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren*, BWV 10/1, mm. 1–3.

⁸³ BWV 154/7, mm. 1–14.

⁸⁴ BWV 105/5, mm. 1–12.

⁸⁵ BWV 243/2, mm. 1–17. See also the accompaniment to the bass aria from the cantata *Gelobet sei der Herr, mein Gott* (BWV 129/2, mm. 1–16).

⁸⁶ BWV 180/2, mm. 1–18. This motif is given in example 5.16c.

⁸⁷ BWV 78/1, mm. 17–21 et seq.



Ex. 5.39b. *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen*, BWV 103/1, mm. 1–3.



Ex. 5.39c. *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland II*, BWV 62/1, mm. 1–2.

The oboes play some motifs in the same rhythm in the accompaniments to the choruses in the cantatas *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen* (Rejoice, ye hearts)⁸⁸ and *Nun ist das Heil und die Kraft* (Now the salvation and power has come).⁸⁹

Then, we see this invigorating rhythmic figure again in the basso continuo when the text expresses confidence in God's help,⁹⁰ in His enlightened goodness,⁹¹ or when it proclaims that consolation is at hand.⁹²

This joyful rhythm had already been given its character before Bach used it in his works. For instance, it appeared in the first aria from Alessandro Scarlatti's opera *Le Nozze col' Nemico* (Marriage with the Enemy) that begins with the words "Due belle speranze" (Two beautiful hopes) (ex. 5.40).



Ex. 5.40. Alessandro Scarlatti, *Le Nozze col' Nemico*, Act I, sc. 1:2, mm. 1–3.

This opera dates from 1700.

But Bach also uses this figure to express ideas of wrath in the aria from the cantata *Es reisset euch ein schrecklich Ende* where the text evokes "the avenging judge,"⁹³ and it appears in the aria "Yea, yea, I can defeat thine enemies" from the cantata *Selig ist der Mann*.⁹⁴ However, the essential character of this

⁸⁸ BWV 66/1, mm. 9–29.

⁸⁹ BWV 50/1, mm. 29–36.

⁹⁰ Cantata *Ich hab in Gottes Herz und Sinn* (BWV 92/2, mm. 1–5).

⁹¹ Cantata *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten* (BWV 93/4, mm. 1–11).

⁹² Cantata *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost* (BWV 114/1, mm. 1–7 et seq.).

⁹³ BWV 90/1, mm. 1–7.

⁹⁴ BWV 57/5, mm. 1–16.

rhythmic formula is carried to the furthest degree in the alto recitative from the cantata *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II* (O eternity, thou thund'rous-word) in which Bach augments its spirit by coupling it with melodic motifs that eagerly unfurl themselves while the singer declaims these words with a kind of indignant emphasis: "Forsake, O man, the pleasure of this world, pomp, pride, wealth, honor, and money" (ex. 5.41).



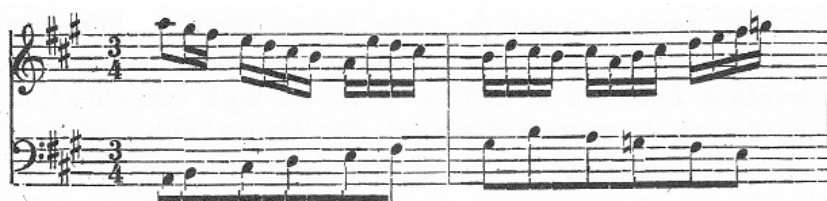
Ex. 5.41. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*, BWV 20/9, mm. 2–5.

An similar image represents the rocks split asunder in the alto recitative of the cantata *Leichtgesinnte Flattergeister* (Superficially minded fickle-spirits) (ex. 5.42).



Ex. 5.42. *Leichgesinnte Flattergeister*. BWV 181/2, mm. 16–19.

As we have already seen, a uniform rapidity of movement symbolizes the many-faceted briskness of life and, by extension, the unfolding of inexhaustible power. Also, this quick movement of notes is a means of directly describing an eager, rushing stride. In the *Christmas Oratorio*, the orchestral accompaniment ingeniously depicts the hastening of the faithful who are making their way toward Bethlehem from all directions—some more agile, some with a moderate gate—but all with the same, nearly unceasing perseverance (ex. 5.43).





Ex. 5.43. *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/26, mm. 1–3.

In the cantata *Bringet dem Herrn Ehre seines Namens*, the solo violin, accompanied by a bass that seems to empower its running, leads with rapid lines into the tenor aria “I hasten to hear the precepts” (ex. 5.44).



Ex. 5.44. *Bringet dem Herrn Ehre seines Namens*, BWV 148/2, mm. 1–2.

In the secular cantata *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten* (Simply go away, sad shadows), the same fluid rhythmic figure governs the aria “Phoebus hastens with rapid coursers” (ex. 5.45).



Ex. 5.45. *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten*, BWV 202/3, mm. 1–2.

In the Easter cantata *Ich weiss, dass mein Erlöser lebt*, the basso continuo imitates and repeats the melismas joined to the words “lives, lives.”⁹⁵ And in the cantata *Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes*, when the alto sings “And just as light quickens the air,” the continuo—until then nearly motionless—suddenly moves in sixteenth notes.⁹⁶

When Bach wants to express that “We see, indeed, here and there on earth a rivulet of contentment, which wells up from the goodness of the Most High,” the

⁹⁵ BWV 160/1, mm. 95–98. [This cantata was composed by Georg Philipp Telemann according to Unger, *Handbook*, 553.—Trans.]

⁹⁶ BWV 76/6, mm. 1–6.

instrumental bass flows forth in rapid notes.⁹⁷ It builds up in fluid runs when the text says “How this lovely word rings in my ears,”⁹⁸ and we find here again the same floating gentleness as in the vocal themes we examined earlier.

With an even more sustained passion, the instrumental accompaniment also describes the surplus of energy that we have already seen interpreted by greatly extended vocal motifs. Rough agitation, desperate struggling, and the din of battles ring out in the impassioned orchestra with an outpouring of encroaching motifs in tumultuous scales—an equestrian music that unfurls in a furious clanking.

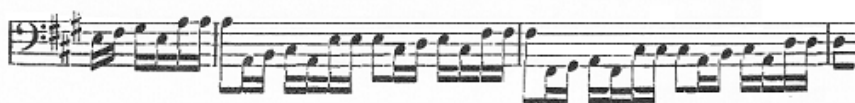
We should note, in particular, the accompaniment to the bass aria and soprano chorale from the cantata *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*: “All that is born of God has been chosen for victory” (ex. 5.46).⁹⁹



Ex. 5.46. *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, BWV 80/2, mm. 1–3.

In the cantata *Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ* (Hold Jesus Christ in remembrance), a similar motif, reinforced with ascending scales in thirty-second notes, proclaims “Jesus helps us do battle.”¹⁰⁰ And the same kind of quick boldness characterizes the accompaniment to the bass aria from the cantata *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland II*.¹⁰¹ Its words are “Fight, conquer, O strong champion!”

Lastly, stormy rhythms rage when Bach wants to give his orchestra the roars that the text lets us imagine. It happens this way in the tenor aria from the cantata *Liebster Immanuel* at the words “When the tempests rage.” A short and ponderously abrupt motif is repeated there several times by the continuo and oboes (ex. 5.47).



Ex. 5.47. *Liebster Immanuel, Herzog der Frommen*, BWV 123/3, mm. 23–26.

⁹⁷ Cantata *Gott soll allein mein Herze haben* (BWV 169/2, mm. 34–41).

⁹⁸ Cantata *Ich freue mich in dir* (BWV 133/4, mm. 9–17).

⁹⁹ See some analogous motifs in Zachow, *Denkmäler Deutsche Tonkunst*, 1:21, 22:66).

¹⁰⁰ BWV 67/6, mm. 1–9.

¹⁰¹ BWV 62/4, mm. 1–12.

A cataclysmic uproar erupts in the cantata *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott* when the instrumental bass is evoking the world's destruction by fire (ex. 5.48).



Ex. 5.48. *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott*, 127/4, mm. 21–22.

The hurricane swirls in a violent thirty-second note motif played in octaves by the violins, violas, and bass in the tenor aria “Storm then, storm ye tempests of tribulation” from the cantata *Schau, lieber Gott*.¹⁰²

The muted rumblings of the low instruments play throughout the bass aria from the cantata *Schauet doch und sehet* (Behold, indeed, and see) like a background of black clouds in whose midst the trumpet beams tragically while the singer declaims “Thy storm drew on from afar.”¹⁰³ Here again we come across the motif fashioned out of rapidly repeated notes mingled with some strident themes in the strings, followed by slowly rising chromatic sequences as if in a threatening approach, and then giving way bit by bit to an intensification of rumbling.

In the tenor recitative from the cantata *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten* (Whoever just allows the dear God to rule), the bass's descent, followed by its drawn out quivering, evokes the image of storm and lightning (ex. 5.49).



Ex. 5.49. *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten*, BWV 93/5, mm. 3–5.

Bach also has the basses produce this terrifying rumbling on words that overwhelm the soul like a thunderbolt in the tenor aria from the cantata *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*.¹⁰⁴ In the dialogue cantata *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort II*, the formidable shuddering of thunder is imitated in the orchestra by a repeated-note motif,¹⁰⁵ and it is the same in the accompaniment of the first chorus from the

¹⁰² BWV 153/6, mm. 1–10.

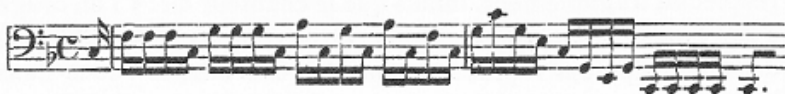
¹⁰³ BWV 46/3, mm. 1–109.

¹⁰⁴ BWV 154/1, mm. 37–43.

¹⁰⁵ BWV 60/1, mm. 1–14 et seq.

large cantata based on the same chorale.¹⁰⁶ A violently shaking orchestral bass also accompanies the bass recitatives in the cantata *Wachet! be-tet! betet! wachet!* at the sight of the world's destruction on the day of wrath.¹⁰⁷

The principal motif ends again with deep trembling in the bass aria from the cantata *Meine Seel erhebt den Herrn*: "God casts mighty ones from their seats down into the pit of brimstone" (ex. 5.50).



Ex. 5.50. *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren*, BWV 10/4, mm. 1–2.

* * *

Broken-up Accompaniments

Bach uses broken-up instrumental motifs that barely support the vocal line when the words express uncertainty, anguish of expectation, sighs, and moans. Right after the orchestral bass has sounded the tonic in the alto recitative from the cantata *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*, the oboes play short, separated groups of notes, in between which the voice pursues its own line alone while the orchestra takes particular care not to guide it. This contradiction of rhythms and lack of underpinnings produces an apprehensiveness that builds up all the way to the end. The words express dread: "In waiting there is danger; wouldst thou lose the opportunity? The God who was formerly merciful can easily lead thee before his judgment seat," etc. (ex. 5.51).



Ex. 5.51. *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*, BWV 102/6, mm. 1–3.

In the tenor recitative from the cantata *Schauet doch und sehet*, the wailing of the flutes undulates, interspersed with silences and hardly any bass accompaniment, while the tenor declaims "So lament thou, O destroyed city of God, thou poor heap of stone and ash!" (ex. 5.52).

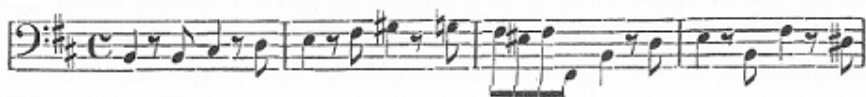
¹⁰⁶ BWV 20/1, mm. 13–27.

¹⁰⁷ BWV 70/2, mm. 1–8 and /9, mm. 1–22.



Ex. 5.52. *Schauet doch und sehet, ob irgendein Schmerz sei, wie mein Schmerz*, BWV 46/2, mm. 1–3.

In the first chorus from the cantata *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz*, the orchestral bass is constantly interrupted (ex. 5.53a). In the cantata *Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust*, the violins and violas that play the lowest part in the alto aria accompanied by the two-manual organ also proceed in separated groups of notes for expressing affliction (ex. 5.53b). In the alto recitative from the cantata *Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder*, the continuo interprets the words of the vocal part—"I am weary from sighing"—with a drowsy theme broken up by silences (ex. 5.53c), and the violins play a broken-up melody imitating the voice in this passage of the bass aria from the cantata *Herr, wie du willst*: "Then pangs of death press ye these groans out of my heart" (ex. 5.53d).



Ex. 5.53a. *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz*, BWV 138/1, mm. 1–4.

Violins and violas in unison



Ex. 5.53b. *Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust*, BWV 170/1, mm. 1–3.



Ex. 5.53c. *Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder*, BWV 135/4, mm. 1–3.



Ex. 5.53d. *Herr, wie du willst*, BWV 73/4, mm. 13–18.

* * *

Meaningful Harmony in the Accompaniment

As for the harmony produced specifically by the accompanying instruments, it is just as meaningful and is governed by the same expressive principles as the harmony produced by the combined voices.

The expressive use of dissonant chords is constant, whether in the orchestra or the basso continuo that the clavier player or organist must realize according to figured-bass indications.

In the cantata from his youthful period, *Ich weiss, dass mein Erlöser lebt*, Bach writes a diminished-seventh chord when the text bewails the shackles binding Jesus.¹⁰⁸ These kinds of harmonies are the most frequent in the accompaniment to the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* where we have elsewhere pointed them out in the choruses,¹⁰⁹ and they abound in the tenor recitative of the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele*.¹¹⁰ When it is a question of sin,¹¹¹ damnation,¹¹² grief,¹¹³ sadness,¹¹⁴ death,¹¹⁵ betrayal,¹¹⁶ and hatred,¹¹⁷ the orchestra or the basso continuo emphasizes the emotive word with a dissonant chord.

¹⁰⁸ BWV 160/2, mm. 7–8. [This cantata was composed by Georg Philipp Telemann according to Unger, *Handbook*, 553.—Trans.]

¹⁰⁹ BWV 21/2, mm. 10–14 and /3, mm. 5–17.

¹¹⁰ BWV 78/3, mm. 2, 3, 5, 9, 14, 17, 18, 20, 23.

¹¹¹ Cantata *In allen meinen Taten* (BWV 97/5, m. 2).

¹¹² Cantata *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* (BWV 91/2, m. 18).

¹¹³ The bass recitative from the cantata *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten* (BWV 93/2, mm. 12–13).

¹¹⁴ *St. Matthew Passion* (BWV 244/16, m. 10; /24, m. 13). Cantata *Weichet nur betrübte Schatten* (BWV 202/1, mm. 6–7).

¹¹⁵ *St. John Passion* (BWV 245/5, m. 4).

¹¹⁶ *St. Matthew Passion* (BWV 244/1, m. 32).

¹¹⁷ Cantata *Vergnügte Ruh* (BWV 170/2, m. 3) and *Komm, du süsse Todesstunde* (BWV 161/2, m. 3).

The opposition between exuberant joy that is manifested so generously and the bitter, concentrated pain that secretly tears at the heart, is scored with a marvelous verity in the alto recitative from the cantata *Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig* (Ah, how transient, ah, how ephemeral). “Joy is turned into sadness,” says the text, and a repetitive melisma unfurls on the first words, accompanied by an ample harmony of a sixth, but the last word is declared briefly and penetratingly on an impassioned chord (ex. 5.54).

Alto

Die Freu - - - - - de wird zu Traurigkeit
Joy - - - - - is turned into sadness

Ex. 5.54. *Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig*, BWV 26/3, mm. 1–2.

Ultimately, the sequence of gentle consonances spreads throughout the orchestra, as in the vocal parts, to tell of infinite praises, happiness, and the calm of hearts possessed by God. We should also note the introduction to the cantata *Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir* (Lord God, we all praise thee), in which the instruments beam with bright harmonies;¹¹⁸ the soprano aria of the cantata *Du sollst Gott, deinen Herren*, in which the oboes undulate in fervent thirds;¹¹⁹ and let me again point out the sixths in the introduction to the cantata *Wohl dem, der sich auf seinen Gott*,¹²⁰ as well as the flourishing sixths in the accompaniment to the alto aria “Lord, whatever thou wilt, shall please me” from the cantata *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe*.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ BWV 130/1, mm. 1–3.

¹¹⁹ BWV 77/3, mm. 1–6.

¹²⁰ BWV 139/1, mm. 1–3.

¹²¹ BWV 156/4, mm. 5–6.

CHAPTER SIX

ORCHESTRATION

Orchestration determined by the text. – Use in the accompaniment of instruments designated by the singing. – Examples before Bach. – Examples in Bach's works. – Expressive orchestration: Violins. – Viols. – Cellos. – Violone. – Winds. – Recorders. – Transverse flutes. – Oboes. – Oboes d'amore. – Oboes da caccia. – Bassoon. – Trumpets. – Horns. – Trombones. – Cornet. – Lute. – Clavier and Organ.

Orchestration Determined by the Text

Within the marvelous diversity of Bach's orchestra we can uncover an entire language whose richness of coloring is at once meaningful and delightful—as full of imagery as it is of nuances. Each instrument, which speaks with its own particular voice, also has its distinctive expressive character and maintains a kind of personality of feelings. The different kinds of timbre not only contrast in their variety to delight our ears, but they also seem to attune themselves with the many changes of the heart through their infinite colorings. This shimmering play of sounds and emotions is at Bach's disposal either to beguile our attention through a variegated orchestration or to captivate our souls through an impassioned one. He has more choices with it and, at the same time, a double advantage because his resources are even greater than when composing for voices. In fact, the two procedures don't exclude each other, and it turns out that the changing ensemble of contrasting sonorities actually benefits the music's passion.

*Use in the Accompaniment of Instruments
Designated by the Singing*

The earlier masters practiced a somewhat different form of instrumentation that was more directly determined by the words to which they composed. Heinrich Schütz uses this kind of primitive orchestration for his Psalms, in which, to accompany the singing, he has instruments play that are mentioned in the text. Thus, in the passage from Psalm 150 “lobet ihn mit Posaunen” (praise him with trombones), he has the trombones play in three parts. And when, in the same work, he comes to the verse where it says to praise the Lord “with strings and winds,” the flute and violin begin to converse. Lastly, substituting for kettledrums, the basso continuo resounds gravely to imitate the solemn and steady cadence of tambour drums—leaders of sacred dances—to the words “lobet ihn mit Pauken und Reigen” (praise him with drums and dance).¹

We find the literary counterpart, so to speak, of this descriptive piece in a poem that appears below the title of a cantata composed for a Collegium musicum that Christian Friedrich Hunold includes in his treatise *Die allerneueste Art, zur reinen und galanten Poesie zu gelangen*.² The poem presents us first with a poet prey to melancholy who is seeking a remedy for his troubles; then the violins are suddenly heard tuning up: “What’s this?” he says. “Is the music of the violins going to calm my soul? . . . It surely will.” He will be consoled by the soft sound of the strings, in light of which he naïvely recalls hearing that in Naples they knew of no other cure against the venom “of a certain species of spider.” When the bitter poison of sadness penetrates his heart, he figures that music must furnish a panacea, and he asks that the best pieces be played. (The writer indicates that a sonata for violins is to be played at this moment.) “We must honor you as virtuosi,” he continues, “but I would be pleased to hear the oboe and then the gentle flute.” (Here the two instruments are to be played alternatively.) “Perfect! My melancholia yields bit by bit. But be so kind as to play the Tekely march once more.” (the march is played.) Then, several stanzas later, the poet hears the viola da gamba, and he praises the artist’s delicate bowing and the instrument’s

¹ Schütz, *Die mehrchörigen Psalmen mit Instrumenten* (1619). *Sämmtliche Werke*, op. 2, pt. 2, 3:46, 57, 59). See also the music to the same verses in the second part of Schütz’s *Symphoniae sacrae* (1647), *Sämmtliche Werke*, modern ed., 7:54 et seq. I should also note that composers of the 16th century had already attempted to represent solely through the voices the instruments mentioned in the texts that they were singing. We find numerous examples of this non-orchestral orchestration in the *Bataille de Marignan* by Clément Jannequin and in the *Exultate Deo* by Palestrina in Charles Bordes’s *Anthologie des maîtres religieux primitives* (Paris: Schola Cantorum, c. 1900), motets, 1:164. Vincenzo Galilei complains about this use and condemns it in *Dialogo della Musica antica et della moderna* (1581), 89.

² This work was published in 1707 in Hamburg under the name of Menantes. See *An ein Collegium musicum*, 329.

enchanting sweetness. After hearing the playing of a whole series of pieces composed on traditional dance rhythms, Hunold has his cantata end by calling all the players to come forth, and they are finally united as an ensemble.

In this fantasy, the orchestra depends strictly on the poem for announcing the particular instruments, for outlining a scenario for them to follow, and for giving an account of their successive performances. The same thing happens in several of Bach's works where the instruments used are designated by the poet of the libretto—imposed, so to speak, on the composer. Therefore, when he draws upon the third movement of the first *Brandenburg Concerto* to compose the initial chorus for the *Dramma per musica*—executed in 1726 for the “act of promotion” of Gottlieb Kortte, “professor extraordinaire” of law at the University of Leipzig³—Bach obviously transforms the *Brandenburg* orchestration to endow the cantata chorus with a solemn magnificence, but he also adapts certain details of the instrumentation with an ingenious fidelity to the text itself. The first verses create an allusion to “the antagonism reconciled by the changing strings” and to the “penetrating crash of the kettledrum rolls,” and when the chorus pronounces several times the words “der rollenden Pauken durchdringende Knall” (the rolling kettledrums’ penetrating beat),⁴ the kettledrums and the basso continuo accompany the voices. The delight that Bach takes in this correspondence between the musical coloring and the content of the libretto is also shown in another place in the same composition, and its meaning is revealed by varied means in an even more precise manner. In fact, he again uses this chorus, based on the allegro of the first *Brandenburg Concerto*, in a cantata written for the birthday of Augustus III, Elector of Saxony.⁵ In this new version, he no longer transforms the instrumentation to correspond to the general feeling and imagery of the poet’s work, but he actually adds the poetry to interpret facets of the music. In the other cantata written for the university celebration in Kortte’s honor, Bach has replaced the horns from the concerto with trumpets, added some kettledrums as we noted, combined flutes with oboes, and reworked some other parts, but only the kettledrums were added to it to give a very distinct musical proclamation. On the contrary, here in the chorus from the birthday cantata, the entire orchestration becomes gifted with speech through the metamorphosis of the text. The trumpet bursts out from the beginning to go along with the first words “Ring out, resound joyous trumpet fanfares,” and the “thundering” kettledrums serve the same

³ The autograph score carries the title *Drama bey des Herrn D. Korttens erhaltener Profession, aufgeführt von. Joh. Seb. Bach*. Born in 1698, Kortte was promoted 11 December 1726. He died in 1731, leaving some editions of Salluste, Lucain, the letters of Cicero, etc. Beyond the authors cited by Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:458, we can consult the *Mémoires* by Nicéron (vol. 35) on the subject of Kortte.

⁴ *Vereinigte Zwietracht der wechselnden Saiten* (BWV 207/2, mm. 30–35; 93–97; and 102–104).

⁵ *Dramma per Musica Namenstage des Königs Augustus, Churfürsten von Sachsen. Aufschmetternde Töne der muntern Trompeten* (BWV 207a/1, mm. 1–14).

purpose. The string section, playing alone, prepares for the chorus's words "Charming strings, enchant our ears," and then the flute assumes just as important a role because the text is going to say "Try to play something even more beautiful on the flute."

In the dramatic cantata *Schleicht, spielende Wellen* (Linger, playful waves)—performed in Leipzig 7 October 1734 for the birthday of Augustus III, guest of the city since 2 October—a soprano aria is accompanied by three flutes, and the fluid elegance of this rarely employed orchestration is due to Bach's desire to realize as scrupulously as possible the meaning of the words "Listen! The chorus of sweet flutes gladdens the heart and enchants the ear. The power of their inseparable unity creates this lovely harmony and produces even greater wonders. Notice this, and find among yourselves a strong concord like theirs."⁶

It would seem that such an exactitude might risk seeming childish to those who do not tolerate the easy tricks and naïve pursuits of earlier composers; however, it has a great deal of value for us in our study, since we find further proof in it of Bach's persistent will to hold our attention through impressions and ideas. Furthermore, the arrangement of the text from the cantata *Auf, schmetternde Töne* (Rise up, ringing sounds) proves to us that Bach bestowed a great objective value on these imitations—or rather, these reflections—of the text in the orchestra.

In 1733, with the same precession, he celebrated the queen of Poland's birthday with the cantata *Tönet, ihr Pauken!, Erschallet, Trompeten!* (Sound, kettledrums! Ring out, trumpets!), and the correspondences there between text and instrumentation are striking. The kettledrums repeat a the same motif right after the voices have sung it on "Sound the kettledrums" in a vigorous unison, and then the trumpets burst forth following the words "Ring out, trumpets."⁷ Lastly, we see that the strings alone accompany the chorus on the words "melodious strings."⁸

This sonorous portrayal curiously recalls Hunold's cantata for the Collegium musicum, and perhaps in composing the queen's birthday cantata, for which he drafted the text himself,⁹ Bach remembered the poem by this literary man with whom he had collaborated several years earlier.¹⁰ No fictional plot was better

⁶ BWV 206/9, mm. 1–20. [The first performance of this cantata was 7 October 1736 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 270.—Trans.]

⁷ BWV 214/1, mm. 33–43.

⁸ BWV 214/1, mm. 47–57 et seq.

⁹ The words are, in fact, Bach's. See Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:461. [The author of this cantata text is uncertain according to Boyd, *Bach*, 271.—Trans.]

¹⁰ On Christian Friedrich Hunold (1680–1721), we can consult the article by W. Creizenach in the *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie* (1881), 13:419. Ph. Spitta has written a very interesting article on Bach's relation to Hunold entitled *Über die Beziehungen Sebastian Bach zu Christian Friedrich Hunold und Mariane von Ziegler*. This work is found in the *Historische und philologische Aufsätze Ernst Curtius zu seinem 70ten Geburtstage am 2te Sept. 1884 gewidmet* (Berlin: 1884), no. 27:404. However, he does not point out there this cantata's poem by Hunold, which could have influenced Bach in composing the libretto for the cantata *Tönet, ihr Pauken!*

appropriated by a composer of mediocre poetic ability than this linking of words and ideas so dear to Bach's heart. It is also not enough for him to evoke the kettledrums, trumpets, and strings in the first chorus, and he still needs to call upon the flutes in a soprano aria. Without holding out for a subtler text that calls for their use, he brings the flutes in quite simply through Bellone's lips, since they are martial instruments. The war goddess sings "Blast die wohlgegriffenen Flöten"¹¹ (Play the well-tuned flutes) amidst motifs in thirds on the transverse flutes—those lively flutes of Swiss mercenaries and German soldiers. His libretto therefore also becomes a sort of concert program—worded haphazardly¹² and mingled with exclamations and salutations.

In the wedding cantata *O holder Tag, erwünschte Zeit* (O lovely day, welcome time)—that Spitta estimates to have been written in Bach's last years, perhaps in 1749¹³—we again find an allusion in the orchestra to the words. Several flute notes, already broken up and soon stopping, lead into the soprano aria "Silence, flute tones . . .,"¹⁴ and another one is found earlier in the *Trauer-Ode*, composed in 1727 for the funeral service of Christiane Eberhardine, queen of Poland. The words of the soprano aria "Silence, silence, pleasant strings" are reflected there by interruptions in the string section's accompaniment.¹⁵

Other correspondences between the orchestration and the text are found again in several sacred cantatas. For example, in the cantata *Wachet! betet!*, the trumpet plays the melody from a chorale with a threatening text, accompanied by a tumultuous orchestra, as the bass foretells the terrors of judgment day and the frightening final blast of the trumpets.¹⁶ In the bass recitative from the cantata *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott*, the trumpet also pours forth in a grand, tragic fanfare when the singer heralds the moment that trumpets will sound and heavenly firmaments will shatter into pieces.¹⁷ The second part of the cantata *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort!* begins with a bass aria in which the frightful awakening signaled by the brazen sound of the trumpet's flashing notes shakes the entire orchestra.¹⁸

Lastly, in the first chorus of the cantata *Erschallet ihr Lieder, erklinget ihr Saiten* (Resound, ye songs; ring out, ye strings!), we can perceive many times in the instruments' sonorous groupings a kind of set purpose for making the

¹¹ BWV 214/2, mm. 1–15.

¹² Spitta points out some impurities of language in this text that he deems awkwardly laid out (*J. S. Bach*, 2:461).

¹³ [The period of composition of this cantata was 1738–41 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 270.—Trans.]

¹⁴ BWV 210/6, mm. 1–3.

¹⁵ BWV 198/3, mm. 1–10.

¹⁶ BWV 70/9, mm. 1–10.

¹⁷ BWV 127/4, mm. 1–7.

¹⁸ BWV 20/8, mm. 1–10.

successive ensemble passages, colored by different timbres, correspond with indications given in the text.¹⁹

Bach takes so much care in directly expressing these details of instrumentation suggested in the texts, and he relishes this process too much not to attempt to apply it even when the “substance of sound” designated by the text does not belong, strictly speaking, to the orchestra’s resources. So it seems to him very justifiable to have hand bells (*campanella*) ringing in the beautiful alto aria that, by itself, forms the entire cantata *Schlage doch, gewünschte Stunde* (Strike then, desired hours).²⁰ In other rather numerous instances, he evokes the bell’s sound with the help of the regular orchestral instruments, and these imitations are quite often created through some very unusual instrumental combinations.

Examples before Bach

We should note here that imitation of bells is one of the favorite pictorial motifs of 17th-century composers. As early as the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* we find a piece by William Byrd (1543–1623) that, under the title of *The Bells*, represents their monotonous pealing.²¹ Louis Couperin (1630?–65) represents the death knell in his *Tombeau de M. Blanc-Rocher* (Tombstone of Mr. Blanc-Rocher),²² and the first volume of the Philidor collection at the Paris Conservatory library contains a “Piece that was written by Mr. Couperin to imitate the carillons of Paris and that has always been played on the organ of Saint-Gervais between the Toussin vespers and the vespers for the dead.”²³ Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (1630?–80) reproduces the close harmonies of “the bells of death” in his *Lamento sopra la morte Ferdinandi III* (Lament on the death of Ferdinand III) (1657),²⁴ and Poglietti also imitates bells.²⁵

¹⁹ BWV 172/1, mm. 1–26.

²⁰ BWV 53, mm. 26–42.

²¹ Byrd, *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, ed. Mssrs. Fuller-Maitland and Barclay Squire (London and Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1894–99), 1:274.

²² This piece is offered by Farrenc in the *Trésor des Pianistes* (vol. 20). Son of a certain Lisette and godson of the prince of Conti, we read that Blanc-Rocher was an “admirable lutenist” in *Historiettes de Tallemant des Réaux* (ed. Monmerqué, 1:195). He is cited with praise by Mersenne in *Harmonie universelle* (Paris: 1636), and Froberger also created the *Tombeau* of “his friend” Blanc-Rocher, who died during a stay in Paris. In this piece we find octaves in the bass that repeat like the slow tolling of the death knell in *Clavierwerke*, ed. Adlger in *Denkmaler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich* (Vienna: 1897), X²:114.

²³ Philidor collection, p. 71. On page 74 we find a second carillon.

²⁴ This piece is found in a manuscript collection compiled by Rost (1688) and handed down by Seb. de Brossard to the Bibliothèque Royale (Bibl. nat. vol. 7, 1099, no. 116).

²⁵ Adler, *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich*, 13: 36.

Pierre Gaultier presents us with a “Carillon” in his *Symphonies* that were published ten years after his death in 1707,²⁶ and Jean-Ferry Rebel gives the title “Les Cloches” (The bells) to a selection in the third suite of his *Pièces pour le Violon* (1705).²⁷ There is also a “Carillon” in the second book of *Pièces de Viole* by Marin Marais (1701),²⁸ and Pierre Dandrieu, organist at Saint-Barthélémy in Paris, includes several of them in his collection of pieces for organ and clavier.²⁹ Lastly, we should also remember François Couperin’s piece entitled *Le Carillon de Cythère*.³⁰

In all these imitations, it is quite rare to meet any attempt that does not emanate from a common and unoriginal craft. The composers are seldom very inventive with them, and they do little more than repeat simple descriptive effects. The isolated impact of low notes, the to and fro of octaves, the short and obstinate themes, the silvery chatter of upper register notes—these are their only resources for depicting such complex sounds. They usually think of reproducing continual chiming, or they are content with some very simple chords to evoke the clash of trailing harmonics.³¹ Most often, they do not even go that far, and they are content with balancing the rhythms, repeating the motifs, and being faithful to such meager and infantile pictorial conventions.

Examples in Bach’s Works

Frequently, and with good reason, Bach himself is content with these simplified means because he does not want to give too much importance to an accessory description where, in certain cases, it is more valuable just to allow the particular representation to show through without being highlighted. In this vein, the pizzicato basso continuo tolls discreetly in the tenor aria from the cantata *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben*: “Why wouldst thou, O my spirit, be horrified when my last hour strikes?”³² In the beautiful bass aria from the cantata *Herr, wie du willst*, when the singer exclaims “Then strike ye bells of death,” the droning of detached and vibrant notes enshrouds the melody,³³ and he uses the

²⁶ Gaultier was director of the opera troupe that performed alternatively in Marseille, Montpellier, and Lyon. He perished at sea with his entire company in 1697.

²⁷ Rebel was then a regular violinist at the Paris Opera.

²⁸ Marais, *Pièces de Viole*, 2:51.

²⁹ Dandrieu, *Noëls, O filii, Chansons de Satin-Jacques, Stabat mater, and Carillons, le tout revu, augmenté, extrêmement varié et mis pour l’orgue et le clavecin*. This collection, wrongly attributed to J. F. Dandrieu, is found in the *Catalogue de la Réserve de la Bibliothèque du Conservatoire*, ed. J. B. Weckerlin (1885), 458.

³⁰ Couperin, *Pièces de Clavecin* (Paris: Boivin, 1722), book 3, 14th order, 18.

³¹ In particular, I cite Schmelzer’s *Lamento*.

³² BWV 8/2, mm. 1–12.

³³ BWV 73/4, mm. 46–59.

same procedure in the tenor aria from the cantata *Christus, der ist mein Leben*. But it is enriched there in an ingenious way: the oboes d'amore, as they linger on dissonant held notes, sustain the violins' and bass's beats similar to the echoing of the distorted harmonies that sometimes trail along on the air after bells stop tolling.³⁴ In the soprano aria from the cantata *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott*, the flutes tremble softly in repeated thirds while the bass plays alternating pizzicato octaves. The floating flute notes shimmer above the bass like a mist in pale light, while the voice, accompanied by the oboe, sings "My soul will rest in Jesus's hands when earth covers this body. Ah, call me soon, ye bells of death; I am not afraid of dying because my Jesus shall awaken me again."³⁵

Bach had already created a tableau of a very similar descriptive coloring in the cantata *Komm, du süsse Todesstunde* that Spitta dates from 1715.³⁶ The text never actually speaks of death bells, but only of "thou final hourly-stroke;"³⁷ however, Bach goes beyond the image suggested by this description and represents a steady death knell pealing in a bell tower. Below is this passage taken from the second alto recitative (ex. 6.1a), which is interesting to compare with the beginning and middle of the soprano aria from the cantata *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott* seen in the two following examples (ex. 6.1b, c).

Flutes

Violins & Violas pizz.

so schlage doch, schlage doch, du letz - - ter Stundenschlag, so schlage doch, schlage doch
 so strike then, strike then, thou final hourly-stroke, so strike then, strike then

³⁴ BWV 95/5, mm. 1–13 et seq.

³⁵ BWV 127/3, mm. 1–12. We can note a similar orchestral effect—and in a brighter tonality as well—in the first chorus from the cantata *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben* (BWV 8/1, mm. 1–13 et seq.).

³⁶ [The first performance of this cantata was possibly 27 September 1716 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 263.—Trans.]

³⁷ In the soprano aria from the cantata *Freue dich, erlöste Schaar* "Hasten, redeemed throng," the instruments create a kind of tick-tocking through the playing of alternating octaves (BWV 30/10, mm. 6–13).

schlage doch, du letz - er Stun - den - schlag!
strike then, thou final hourly-stroke!

Ex. 6.1a. *Komm, du süsse Todesstunde*, BWV 161/4, mm. 23–28.³⁸

Flutes (à bec)
staccato

Oboe

Die See - le ruht in Je - su Händen Die See - le
My soul rests in Jesus's hands My soul
(My soul will rest in Jesus's hands)

³⁸ Spitta also cites this recitative fragment in *J. S. Bach*, 1:543, and he considers the orchestral part to be imitating the sound of bells of different loudness, but in my opinion it represents instead the vibrating of a single, enormous bell enveloped in its harmonics.

ruht - - - in Je - su Hän - den wenn Er - - -
rests in Jesus's hands when earth - - -
shall rest in Jesus's hands when earth - - -

- de die - - sen Leib be - deckt.
shall this body covers.
(shall cover this body.)

Ex. 6.1b. *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott*, BWV 127/3, mm. 9–15.

Flöten
Oboe

Ach, ruft mich, ruft mich bald, ach, ruft mich bald, ihr Sterbe
Ah, call me, call me soon, ah, call me soon, ye bells-

The image shows a musical score for a vocal part, likely a recitative. It consists of four staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The second staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The third staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The fourth staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are written below the third staff. The lyrics are in German and English. The German lyrics are: glo - chen, ich bin zum Sterben, zum Sterben un - er - schrocken. The English lyrics are: of-death, I am of dying, of dying unterrified of dying.

Ex. 6.1c. *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott*, BWV 127/3, mm. 29–33.³⁹

Bach produces a marvelous imitation of bells in the alto recitative from the *Trauer-Ode* composed for the ceremony held in Leipzig on 17 October 1727 in memory of Christiane Eberhardine, queen of Poland and electrice of Saxony, who had died on 5 September.⁴⁰ His orchestra for it is made up of a very ingenious combination of a large variety of instruments, and we also find in it again the principal elements that figure in the last examples: flutes that tremble slowly, bitter oboes on dissonant held notes, and pizzicato strings in several parts. Two lutes are also added to this ensemble, and, on this remarkable page, it is as if there is a hurricane of bells echoing the court's solemn mourning throughout the land. In Germany, ordained peals from belfries were rung continuously. For instance, on the day of the queen of Prussia's funeral, 28 June 1705, all of Berlin's bells were rung from seven to eight o'clock in the morning, then at one o'clock while the procession was gathering, and, finally, they rang out at length after the music following the sermon by Bishop Ursinus.⁴¹ Bach's recitative recalls a similar outburst of hammered wails. The poet of the libretto—Johann Christoph Gottsched—evokes the obsession of these unceasing voices: "Ah! may these doleful death knells ringing in our ears every day give testimony to all Europe of our sadness." This entreaty ends the recitative, but as the music fills our ears with the throbbing flood of fluted ringings and unceasing waves, the first verses tell of the anguish of the drowning soul through the vibrant stream of harmonics—even before we hear the fundamental tone in the basso continuo that sets them ringing, which sounds only after this cloud has already begun swirling and ends before it has dissipated (ex. 6.2).

³⁹ In the last half of measure 31 the violins and violas begin playing pizzicato, forming floating chords similar to those found in the next example (ex. 6.2).

⁴⁰ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:447.

⁴¹ Nicolas Gueudeville, *Atlas historique*, abridged from the history of the Electors of Brandenburg (Amsterdam: 1708), vol II, pt. 1, no. 37

RECITATIVO (à tempo)
Flauto traverso (1 & 2)

Oboe (1 & 2)

Violins (1 & 2)

Viola*

Viola da Gamba (1 & 2)

Lute (1 & 2)

Alto

Contrabasso

Der Glo - cken be - düm - des Ge - tön soll uns'rer
The tolling bells' vibrating clamour shall our
(The vibrating clamour of the tolling bells will yet

trä - ben See - len Schrecken durch ihr geschwängtes Er - ze we - cken, und um dar
downcast souls' terror by their swinging bronze awaken, and us through
frighten our downcast souls by their swinging bronze and go through

Mark und A - - dem gehn etc.
 marrow and veins go etc.
 us to the core)

* To facilitate the reading of this page of score, I have transcribed to the G and F clefs the alto, viola da gamba, and lute parts, which are notated in the C clefs.

Ex. 6.2. *Trauer-Ode*, BWV 198/4, mm. 1–5.

Expressive Orchestration: Violins

After having pointed out some examples in Bach of this primitive orchestration that is based on words from the text, it remains for us to study the general orchestration in his works—that is to say, his reasoned use of the different instruments. We will look especially at their expressive function, seeking to recognize the character he attributes to each of them according to the nature of the melodies they play and according to the feeling of the words they accompany.

It is fitting to begin with the most supple and rich of melodic instruments—the violin. In an age when the best violinists were only considered to be gifted village fiddlers,⁴² Mersenne already accords the violin primacy for its charm “because those who play it perfectly—like the gentlemen Bocan,⁴³

⁴² Séré de Rieux (in the poem cited in the Introduction, p. 4) also calls the violin “a bountiful instrument, too long under-appreciated.” *La Musique* (Lyon: 1714).

⁴³ On Jacques Cordier—called Bocan—see the work by Ecorcheville: *Vingt suites d’orchestre du XVII^e siècle français* (Paris: 1906), 12.

Lazarin,⁴⁴ and several others—temper it just as they wish and render it inimitable with certain quaverings that enrapture our spirit.”⁴⁵

For Bach, the solo violin is a voice of tenderness and light, and he makes it beam with an ethereal expansiveness, full of endearments and dazzling feats. He lets it swirl in an intoxicating cantilena when he wants to assuage the soul and imbue it with delights that allow the presentiment of something even rarer. Words of consolation are poured out amidst this efflorescence of notes that heal our hearts by taking over our feelings, bestowing a halo of grace and glory upon phrases of welcome or praise. The instrument is so supple and generous that Bach can express his every dream through the sweet speeches and scintillating prayers that it unfurls, whether it performs solo with the voice and the basso continuo or occupies the first row in the orchestra.

The “Benedictus” from the *Mass in B Minor*⁴⁶ and the “Halleluja” from the cantata for the election of the Leipzig council (1731)⁴⁷ are accompanied by a solo violin, and it also appears in the alto aria from the cantata *Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren* (Praise the Lord, the mighty king of glory)⁴⁸ as well as in the soprano aria from the cantata *Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm* (God, as thy name, so is thy renown).⁴⁹ In the *Christmas Oratorio* it is used in the alto aria “My heart, contain this blessed wonder steadfast in thy faith,”⁵⁰ and it surrounds the trio’s singing with a gentle gleam where the soprano and tenor call out yearningly for the coming of the consoling Messiah and the alto responds to them “He is already here.”⁵¹

This last violin solo abounds in broad arpeggios with even rhythms and in wide, consonant motifs. The entwining continuity and the calm of these long melismas surround the tenor and soprano’s anxious questioning with an atmosphere of peace. The discourse between violin and worried voices has only several notes in common, but the easy persistence of the instrumental phrases and their full harmony give the composition an air of unpolished gold and make one think of the words the alto sings “Be silent, he is already here.”

The violin solo joined to the soprano aria from the cantata *Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille*⁵² possesses an even greater transparent serenity, and while the

⁴⁴ Lazarin is cited in the work by Michel Brenet, *Les Concerts en France sous l’ancien régime* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1900), 57, 59. He died in 1653.

⁴⁵ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, 11.

⁴⁶ BWV 232/24, mm. 1–15 et seq.

⁴⁷ Cantata *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir* (BWV 29/3, mm. 1–28 et seq.).

⁴⁸ BWV 137/2, mm. 1–18 et seq.

⁴⁹ BWV 171/4, mm. 1–9 et seq. This aria is an adaptation of Pallas’s aria in the *Dramma per Musica: Der zufriedengestellte Aeolus* (1725). BWV 205/9, mm. 1–9 et seq.).

⁵⁰ BWV 248/31, mm. 1–36 et seq.

⁵¹ BWV 248/51, mm. 1–53 et seq.

⁵² BWV 120/4, mm. 1–13 et seq. In this aria, Bach uses the *Cantabile, ma un poco Adagio* from the sixth sonata for violin and clavier (BWV 1019/3, mm. 1–12 et seq.).

minor mode casts a veil of melancholy over the solo in the *Christmas Oratorio* that I have just mentioned, the tonality of this entire aria is bright, and it flows along with a great smile in anticipation of the words “Well-being and blessing shall and must at all times come upon our government.”

In the cantata *Wahrlich, wahrlich sage euch* (Truly, I say to you), the effusive inner felicity of the soul trusting in God brims over in a marvelous violin melody on a simple and airy theme that floats like a fragrant vapor in the splendor of a warm morning. These arabesques are mingled with contemplative arpeggios that herald the coming mercy—the grace immediately felt as soon as it is sought. And furthermore, the whole idea is clothed here in a charming image expressed entirely by the music through an interchange of delightful figures: “I will, however, indeed gather roses, even though the thorns prick, for I am of the conviction that my petitioning and entreaty of God assuredly goes to His heart, for his Word promises me this” (ex. 6.3).⁵³



Ex. 6.3. *Wahrlich, wahrlich, ich sage euch*, BWV 86/2, mm. 1–12.

It is within the same fragrant light that the violin accompaniment moves in an even and modest flight to envelope Diana and Endymion’s duet in the cantata composed for the birthday of Christian, duke of Saxe-Weissenfels: “Enchant us, beams of joy, and adorn the heavens with diamonds. Prince Christian, delight in the company of the sweetest roses, free from every sorrow.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Cf. the violin accompaniment in the aria by Zachow in *Denkmäler deutsche Tonkunst* (1905), series 1:16.

⁵⁴ Cantata *Was mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd* (BWV 208/12, mm. 1–16 et seq.

Bach also writes a violin solo to go with the tenor aria “God is my friend; what profits that raging, which the foe has raised against me? I am confident amidst envy and hatred” from the cantata *Wohl dem, der sich auf seinen Gott*.⁵⁵ And we again find this same kind of expression of joy—based on confidence in God—in the cantata *Erfreute Zeit im neuen bunde* (O joyous age of the new covenant), where the violin solo, supported by the string section, horns, and oboes, wreathes the alto aria “O joyous age of the new covenant, when Jesus holds our faith.”⁵⁶

There is an obvious kinship of feeling between this aria and the bass aria from the cantata *Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen* (Dearest Jesus, O my desire),⁵⁷ in which it is actually Jesus himself who speaks “Here in my Father’s abode, a downcast spirit can find me. Here thou canst surely find me and unite thy heart with me, for this is called my dwelling.” To these words the solo violin joins its great streams of brightness, slightly darkened by a discreet chromaticism that recalls that the voice simultaneously alludes to the anguishes of the errant soul searching for Jesus.

We can place in the same category the violin’s commentary in the alto aria from the cantata *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*: “I would to heaven go . . . My abiding is not here, (base Sodom), for I can, indeed, nevermore live in peace with thee.” The violin’s boundings and throbbings interpret the first part of the aria like a beating of wings, and in the second part, it counterbalances with large, connecting arpeggios, as if to oppose the calm of eternal repose against life’s agitation. Here is the introduction, which states all the facets of instrumental development that partner the vocal line throughout the course of this aria (ex. 6.4).



⁵⁵ BWV 139/2, mm. 3–26 et seq.

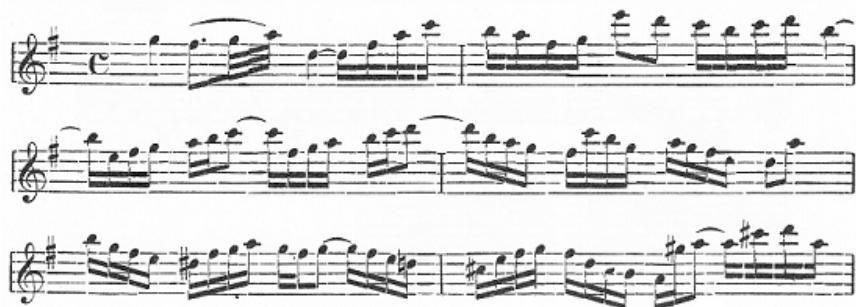
⁵⁶ BWV 83/1, mm. 1–24 et seq.

⁵⁷ BWV 32/3, mm. 1–40 et seq.



Ex. 6.4. *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*,
BWV 146/3, mm. 1–8.

The lyrical effusion is even more exuberant in the violin solo that hovers above the bass aria in the cantata *Der Friede sei mit dir*, whose topic is the same: “World, farewell, I am weary of thee. Jerusalem’s dwellings suit me . . . There I parade adorned with heavenly crowns.” The prelude is nothing but a long ecstatic outpouring, a delirious singing, where visions of heaven rise up ever more animated and fiery, mixed together so that they include memories of an earthly life that is evoked by a rugged and relapsing motif and a rhythmic phrasing that grows more and more weighted down. All the contents of the aria are already found in these few measures that are easy to interpret by referring to the analyses we have done in preceding chapters (ex. 6.5).⁵⁸



⁵⁸ See the examples of the rhythmic motif of dejection, exs. 3.12a, b.



Ex. 6.5. *Der Friede sei mit dir*, BWV 158/2, mm. 1–12.

Like the other above-mentioned violin solos, the one coupled with the tenor aria from the cantata *In allen meinen Taten* expresses the radiance of God's grace that protects against all harm, and we also find there a particular source of virtuosity in Bach's use of the double stop, which adds as much to the sonority as to the expression. Here is the beginning (ex. 6.6):



Ex. 6.6. *In allen meinen Taten*, BWV 97/4, mm. 1–6.

Schütz already uses the double stop in the second part of *Symphoniae sacrae* (1647),⁵⁹ and in the preface he recommends not to risk playing these irregular and difficult accompaniments in public without having studied them.⁶⁰ Naturally, we will have to return to the 17th-century practice of this procedure when we examine Bach's chamber music.

Following all these solos in which joy and magnificence unfurl themselves, we must cite the one joined to the bass solo in the cantata *Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen*.⁶¹ Its theme has already been pointed out above,⁶² and it only remains for us to recall here how the violin's voice knows how to moan and weep so convincingly.

With these expressive qualities, and with the bow's flexible play that, according to Mattheson,⁶³ can "soften, detach, or draw out," the violin possessed yet another advantage for 17th-century composers. However, this gift—undoubtedly less valuable, especially from our modern point of view—was held in esteem by the early masters, and Bach has not entirely avoided drawing upon it. I am speaking of the violin's widely recognized ability to imitate sounds of every sort. Mersenne regarded it admirably and writes "Now, the violin has the advantage over other instruments because, apart from several more heavenly than earthly animal calls, it imitates and pretends to be all sorts of instruments, voices, organs, viol, bagpipes, fife, etc., as well as the kinds that can evoke sadness like the lute and excite like the trumpet, and only those who know how to play it to perfection can represent all that can be imagined."⁶⁴ In 1627, around the time Mersenne composed his *Harmonie universelle*, Carlo Farina shows the use of these marvels in his *Capriccio Stravagante*. Through the violin, Farina lets us hear the dog, cat, trumpet, guitar, drum, etc.⁶⁵ A little later, Johann Heinrich Schmelzer enjoyed reproducing the nasality of the Polish bagpipes from two violins and a bass,⁶⁶ and in his works for violin, Johann Jakob Walther creates a chattering of birds, the singing of a cuckoo, a strumming of the lute, etc.⁶⁷ Lastly, in François Duval's *Quatrième Livre de Sonates* (1708), we find a variation "in the style of the trumpet."⁶⁸

Bach has not misused this illusory richness; however, he quite aptly writes violin accompaniments with fanfare motifs in arias where it is a question of battle, heroes, or victorious power. For example, in the bass aria from the cantata *Selig ist*

⁵⁹ Schütz, "Freuet euch," *Sämmtliche werke*, vol. 7.

⁶⁰ Schütz, *Sämmtliche werke*, vol. 7.

⁶¹ BWV 13/5, mm. 1–14 et seq.

⁶² See the preceding chapter.

⁶³ Johann Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg: 1713), 280.

⁶⁴ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, 183.

⁶⁵ See W. J. von Wasielewski's *Die Violine und ihre Meister*, 58.

⁶⁶ Manuscript collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Inv. vol. 7, 1099, no. 10.

⁶⁷ Schmelzer, *Scherzi da Violino solo* (1676) and Walther, *Hortulus chelicus* (1694).

⁶⁸ Duval, *Quatrième Livre de Sonates* (1708), no. 8, 33.

der Mann, the violins create a combative uproar while the singer says “Yea, yea, I can defeat thine enemies,”⁶⁹ and they also amplify a trumpet melisma at the moment the bass prepares to proclaim “Now comes the champion’s champion” in the cantata *Gott führet auf mit Jauchzen*.⁷⁰ During the bass aria with chorale in the cantata *Ein feste Burg*, the unison violins and violas do not stop agitating with a violent quaking that seems to ring out like brass fanfares.⁷¹ “All that is born of God is chosen for victory” are the words of this aria that resounds with what the contemporaries of Bach’s youth unhesitatingly called a “bruit de guerre” (sound of war). These are patterns of the same structure and rhythm that we find in an episode from the violin sonata by Westhoff that Louis XIV named *La Guerre* (The war) as soon as he heard the composer perform it toward the end of the year 1682.⁷² Additionally, we can also point out the trumpet imitations in the violin parts for vocal works such as the motet *Es erhub sich ein Streit* (There arose a great fight) and the motet by Tobias Zeutschner (1615–75) *Resonent organa* (The sound of organs).⁷³

Viols

Next we will study the group of string instruments that comprises the different types of viols. They are divided into two main classes: in the first we have the viola da braccio (arm viol) and its varieties; and the second is made up of the viola da gamba (leg viol) and its different types.

The viola that we use in the orchestral string section today is the only one of the “arm viols” that has survived. Bach uses the solo viola in the cantata *Wo soll ich fliehen hin* to accompany the tenor aria “Overflow profusely, thou divine spring,”⁷⁴ and he employs two violas in Hercules’s and Virtue’s duet “I am with you” in the secular cantata *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege* (1733).⁷⁵ In the cantata *Herr Gott, dich loben wir*, the violetta (six-string viol) appears in the tenor aria “Beloved Jesus.”⁷⁶ So we see that, for Bach, these instruments had a well-defined character of tenderness, and his contemporaries felt so too. Mattheson considers, on one hand, that the harmonic role of the violas gives a fullness to a performance—for which they are “one of the most necessary elements”—and, on

⁶⁹ BWV 57/5, mm. 1–16 et seq.

⁷⁰ BWV 43/6, mm. 1–3.

⁷¹ BWV 80/2, mm. 1–13 et seq.

⁷² Jean Doineau de Visé, *Mercure gallant*, December 1682, 386.

⁷³ Zeutschner, *Musicalische Kirchen-und Haus Freude* (Leipzig: 1661), nos. 6 and 9.

⁷⁴ BWV 5/3, mm. 1–20 et seq.

⁷⁵ BWV 213/11, mm. 1–20 et seq.

⁷⁶ BWV 16/5, mm. 1–19 et seq. In the tenor recitative from the cantata *Ich lasse dich nicht*, the same instrument is used in the accompaniment, but only as a harmonizing part, (BWV 157/3, mm. 1–14).

the other hand, he praises their deep sonority that possesses in and of itself something “quaint and charming” when they are played in unison.⁷⁷ Bach uses them blended in this way in the cantata *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt*, where four violas in unison, with flutes added an octave above, accompany the soprano aria “My soul’s treasure is God’s Word.”⁷⁸ In quite a large number of cantatas, he also combines violas with the violins and has them play the same part. The generous timbre of this orchestral mixture, both somber and penetrating, has a very mysterious and moving effect, and Bach employs it in the tenor aria with chorale from the cantata *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe*: “I stand with one foot in the grave . . . soon my ailing body falls therein.” Here is the opening where he combines the principal themes of this aria—the held note that corresponds to the first words “ich steh” (I stand), the motives of downfall, and the descending chromatic pattern that expresses pain and weakness (ex. 6.7):⁷⁹

Violins I & 2 and Viola



Ex. 6.7. *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe*, BWV 156/2, mm. 1–12.

In the cantata *Wo gehest du hin?*, the same ensemble of violins and violas accompany the third stanza of the hymn by Ringwaldt (1530–98) “Lord Jesus Christ, I know well that one day I must die,”⁸⁰ and they are used again that way in the bass aria of the cantata *Ich liebe den Höchsten von ganzem Gemüte*.⁸¹ Spitta, who rightfully admires this aria as a work of great worth, also points out the symbolic interest of the ritornello, where two differently fashioned motifs announce the main ideas contained in the aria—on one hand the blessings of divine grace; and, on the other, the eagerness of the faith possessed by that grace.⁸²

By using the same resources in the first aria from the cantata *Ein ungefärbt Gemüte*, Bach gives a calm and veiled tint to the accompaniment. This entire composition is actually weighed down by a slightly grey and plain atmosphere, but we soon feel its discreet charm, comprised of a singular gentleness

⁷⁷ Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre*, 283.

⁷⁸ BWV 18/4, mm. 1–16 et seq.

⁷⁹ This motif has already been pointed out in the text referring to exs. 2.41a, b.

⁸⁰ BWV 166/3, mm. 1–11 et seq.

⁸¹ BWV 174/4, mm. 1–20 et seq.

⁸² Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:275.

and good nature.⁸³ We find the violas and violins unnified again in the chorale sung by the tenors in the middle of the cantata *Wachet auf*. But here the orchestra does not give off the poetic twilight of the steady and even aria that I just cited; and although this one is more spirited, it nevertheless seems more somber at first. The text speaks of awakening and of light, but, in the beginning, the music seems to surround it with a nocturnal setting where the watchmen's cry, in spite of its echo off the high walls, barely disturbs the sleep of the weary city.⁸⁴ Little by little, through quickening rhythms and the mounting progression of the motifs, the instruments depict the joy of the procession following Jesus as it heads toward the banquet hall.⁸⁵

Sometimes Bach only unifies the violas with the violins to intensify the sound of the latter, and we have already pointed out instances of this procedure in the arias of tumult or battle.⁸⁶ So, to complete this series of examples, it suffices to cite here the bass arias from the cantatas *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland II* and *Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen*. In the first, the words make an allusion to battles and the victory of Christ as "strong champion."⁸⁷ In the second, the orchestra represents the raging waves.⁸⁸ In addition, the basso continuo plays an octave lower than the violins and violas in these two arias—a procedure also used by Reinhard Keiser in his operas.⁸⁹

Bach uses the viola d'amore (larger, fretted viola) in several of his works—an instrument strung with four steel or brass strings and an ordinary gut string. Johann Mattheson notes that its sound is silvery, extremely pleasant, and suitable for tender and languid subjects,⁹⁰ and the arias in which Bach makes use of it can be classified in one or the other of these two expressive categories. Therefore, we meet two violas d'amore in the arioso from the *St. John Passion* "Consider, O my soul, with a sorrowful joy . . . that your greatest good comes from Jesus's sufferings," and the same accompaniment occurs in the following aria.⁹¹ In the birthday cantata for a professor, *Schwingt freudig euch empor* (Soar joyfully aloft), Bach uses the viola d'amore in a delicate aria that speaks of weak and stifled voices,⁹² and it appears again in the charming tenor aria from the *Dramma per*

⁸³ BWV 24/1, mm. 1–15 et seq.

⁸⁴ Note here the rhythmic motif of sleep in the first notes of the bass.

⁸⁵ BWV 140/4, mm. 1–52 et seq.

⁸⁶ See ex. 5.46.

⁸⁷ BWV 62/4, mm. 1–12 et seq.

⁸⁸ BWV 81/5, mm. 1–11 et seq.

⁸⁹ Examples of this are frequent. I cite here the aria from scene 5 in act 3 of *Croesus*, and the aria "Se vivo in tante pene" from *Inganno fedele*.

⁹⁰ Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre*, 282.

⁹¹ BWV 245/19, mm. 1–8 et seq.; /20, mm. 1–6 et seq.

⁹² BWV 36b/7, mm. 1–11 et seq. The same aria, beginning with the same words, is found in the other cantata of the same name, *Schwingt freudig empor* (BWV 36/7, mm. 1–11 et seq.). But there, the viola d'amore is replaced by the muted ("gedämpft") solo violin whose use here forms a direct allusion to the text "Auch mit gedämpften, schwachen Stimmen wird

Musica: Der zufriedengestellte Aeolus (Music drama: The contented Aeolus)—performed for the name-day of August Friedrich Müller, 3 August 1725—whose text celebrates the delightfulness of the cool shade.⁹³

Playing along with the viola d'amore in this aria is the viola da gamba—another of those sweet and delectable instruments that people once relished so much. Mattheson calls it “the murmuring viola da gamba,” and he praises its frail beauty.⁹⁴ In 1623, Heinrich Schütz had already conceived of having four violas da gamba play at the same time to add the tender wonder of these little-heard strings to the wonder of the holy story in the Evangelist's recitative from his *Historia der Auferstehung*.⁹⁵ In 1665, Augustin Pflieger used the viola da gamba to embroider a rather awkwardly gilded filigree in the ode addressed to Duke Christian Albrecht of Schleswig-Holstein during his inauguration at the Academy of Kiel. Then, in the *Anakreonisches Ehr- und Freudenlied* (Anacreontic honor and joy of song), dedicated to Conrad Meckbach, mayor and trustee of Mühlhausen in Thuringia, 9 January 1682, Johann Georg Ahle introduced a soprano aria with a contemplative prelude interspersed with the parallel rhythms of two violas da gamba whose harmony floats beneath the words “Dear, kind muses of Unstrut . . . , in whose honor you wish to be heard, whom do you wish to celebrate with your songs and sounds? . . . , etc.”⁹⁶

In an aria from the *Trauer-Ode*, where the librettist Gottsched evokes the image of “the eternal sapphire palace” facing Christiane Eberhardine, Bach makes this luminous instrumental voice gently radiate,⁹⁷ and it is heard again in the aria from the *St. Matthew Passion* “Come, sweet cross.”⁹⁸ This aria is borrowed from the funeral cantata for Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen where the poet promises the prince “a sweet burial place” in the heart of those who love him. Toward the end of the *St. John Passion*, the viola da gamba speaks with a melancholy already filled with hope in the alto aria “All is accomplished.”⁹⁹ It is the same feeling—mixed with sadness and serenity—that reigns in the aria from the cantata *Gottes Zeit* “Into thy hand I commit my spirit,”¹⁰⁰ in which the violas da gamba accompany in airy and murmuring motifs the chorale melody “With peace and joy I depart thither

Gottes Majestät verehrt” (“Even with subdued, faint tunes is God's majesty worshipped”). Bach uses the sound of the muted violin in several other cantatas. I note here the cantatas *Allein zu dir* (BWV 33/3, mm. 1–11 et seq.) and *O ewiges Feuer* (BWV 34/3, mm. 1–24 et seq.).

⁹³ BWV 205/5, mm. 1–28 et seq.

⁹⁴ Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre*, 283–84.

⁹⁵ Schütz, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1.

⁹⁶ We should remember here that in 1710 “Herr Freidemann Meckbach, *J. U.* Doctor of Mühlhausen” became the godfather of Friedemann Bach, eldest son of Johann Sebastian Bach, then at Weimar (Spitta, *J.S. Bach*, 1:354).

⁹⁷ BWV 198/8, mm. 1–28 et seq.

⁹⁸ BWV 244/66, mm. 113 et seq.

⁹⁹ BWV 245/30, mm. 1–12 et seq.

¹⁰⁰ BWV 106/3a, mm. 1–6.

according to God's will."¹⁰¹ They also appear with the flutes in the sonatina that serves as a prelude to this cantata,¹⁰² in which they proceed peacefully and tenderly in broad, consonant sequences with a certain languor more akin to the blissfulness of repose than to weakness, and their sound has a strange, appealing power. Doni remarks that the violas da gamba "are suitable for serious, sedate, and sad matters."¹⁰³ Certainly, this short sonatina is slow and contemplative and already seems to slumber with death's approach, but Doni's comment does not exactly apply to it, because, although it is somber, it is not sad. The rhythms of joy also lighten its pace, especially in the flute parts, and they also poise themselves almost nonchalantly within the chorus of viols. We might almost say that Bach, dreaming of the delights of "God's hour," is inspired for proclaiming them to us by this passage in which Heinrich Suso, lover of "eternal Wisdom," glorifies his beloved: "A single word that leaves her sweet lips surpasses in harmony the angels' singing and the celestial sound of lutes and viols."

Cellos

Bach, who has the viols play so complacently, generally uses the cello to unfurl broad and somewhat rapid motifs in which the instrument's expressive sound does not have the chance to show itself, but its continuity very often produces quite unusual impressions. These smooth lines, cast about in every direction and drawn without stopping, end by bringing to mind the image of a net of criss-crossed wire, within which we find the accompanied melodies enclosed and captive. Moreover, this image sometimes corresponds exactly to the idea of the text—or emanates from it quite directly—and it is in this vein that Bach entwines a cello arabesque through the chorus of the cantata *Gott ist mein König* (1708) when God is asked never to surrender his turtledoves to the foe.¹⁰⁴ He fulfills the obvious comparison here by describing the bird-catcher's tightly woven nets. Also, in the bass aria from the cantata *Bereitet die Wege*, the cello knots obstinate arpeggios around the melody to depict the child of wrath captured in Satan's nets,¹⁰⁵ and we should also note that the cello plays some similar motifs in the chorus from the *St. John Passion* where there is the question of Jesus's robe—a robe woven without seams.¹⁰⁶ In these last three examples, the cello's slightly rugged precision gives a

¹⁰¹ BWV 106/3b, mm. 38–52 et seq.

¹⁰² BWV 106/1, mm. 1–8 et seq.

¹⁰³ See volume two of Giovanni Batista Doni's *Trattato della musica scenica* (1633–35), ed. Gori (Florence: 1763), pt. 1, 25, 92.

¹⁰⁴ BWV 71/6, mm. 1–10 et seq.

¹⁰⁵ BWV 132/3, 1–17 et seq.

¹⁰⁶ BWV 245/27b, mm. 1–8 et seq.

very distinct shape to the motifs.¹⁰⁷ In the cantata *Nur Jedem das Seine!* (Only to each his own!), Bach resorts again to the purely superficial qualities of the cello when he has two of them produce a sort of metallic shivering to accompany the bass aria “Let my heart be the coinage, which I pay to thee, my Jesus! Though it be not all too clean, ah, then please come and renew, O Lord, the beautiful luster in it! Come, work, melt, stamp it, that thine image in me may shine completely restored!”¹⁰⁸

The cello’s use is more modern, so to speak, in the alto aria from the cantata *Wachet! betet!*, where it is deployed in long, connected, and sad lines while melancholy pours forth from the soul detained in this world like the Israelites in the land of Egypt.¹⁰⁹ In the tenor aria from the cantata *Jesu, nun sei gepreiset*, the violoncello piccolo (piccolo cello) surrounds the voice with harmonious drapings,¹¹⁰ and the same instrument—a miniature cello¹¹¹—pours out a penetrating light in the accompaniment of the chorale sung by the soprano in the cantata *Bleib bei uns*.¹¹² Then it has a broader amplitude in the tenor aria from the cantata *Sie werden euch in den Bann tun II* (They will place you into excommunication).¹¹³

In the soprano aria from the cantata *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt* (Thus has god loved the world)¹¹⁴ and in the soprano aria from the cantata *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen*,¹¹⁵ it seems that Bach had wished to make use of the bright and slightly biting sonority of the piccolo cello to give the orchestration a particular savor as if we are tasting the delicious bitterness of a fruit in early spring. This same greenness—the tart sweetness of a young voice—creates the charm of the simple melismas that the piccolo cello hums like a shepherd’s tune in the tenor aria of the cantata *Er ruft seinen Schafen mit Namen* (He calls his sheep by name) “It seems to me, I see thee coming . . . and thou must be the true shepherd who is so full of love and gentleness.”¹¹⁶ The piccolo cello also figures in the soprano recitative and chorale of the cantata *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele*¹¹⁷ where the poet expresses the longings of the soul eager to take part in the “holy banquet” and to become one with God.

¹⁰⁷ Mattheson recommends it for the cleanness of sound in fast passages (Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre*, 285).

¹⁰⁸ BWV 163/3, mm. 1–15 et seq. The violin plays some analogous passages in the bass aria from the *St. Matthew Passion* where the words allude to the pieces of silver that Judas casts down in the temple (BWV 244/51, mm. 1–14 et seq.).

¹⁰⁹ BWV 70/3, mm. 1–20 et seq.

¹¹⁰ BWV 41/4, mm. 1–13 et seq.

¹¹¹ It was tuned an octave lower than the violin.

¹¹² BWV 6/3, mm. 1–19 et seq.

¹¹³ BWV 183/2, mm. 1–16 et seq.

¹¹⁴ BWV 68/2, mm. 1–16 et seq.

¹¹⁵ BWV 49/4, mm. 1–17 et seq.

¹¹⁶ BWV 175/4, mm. 1–12 et seq.

¹¹⁷ BWV 180/3, mm. 1–14 et seq.

Violone

If we now consider the lowest of string instruments—the violone (double bass)¹¹⁸—we see also that Bach has often been guided in his use of it by his wish to give it meaning. First, he finds it valuable to the orchestra and the chorus for giving the same support as the bass notes of the organ, whose deep firmness he liked, and which, as he himself said, “gives grounding to the whole ensemble.”¹¹⁹ The well-seated solidity of a performance depends on it, and he never unintentionally deprives himself of this massive bass sound upon which he so frequently builds. When he wants to express an idea of instability, he reduces its powerful and even sonority. In the cantata *Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*, in which the alto sings of her staggering distress, the aria is accompanied by arpeggios in the basso continuo, and in order for this moving pedestal to appear even less resistant, the double bass plays pizzicato, and the organ staccato.¹²⁰ But even this moderate support disappears in the soprano aria from the cantata *Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht*, and only the violas play the bass line.¹²¹ Likewise, the violas and violins suffice in the aria from the cantata *Vergnügte Ruh* where they partner the lamenting voice with broken motifs.¹²²

In other instances, Bach leaves the heavy bass aside in order to brighten the color of the composition. For example, in the cantata *Es ist ein trotzig und verzagt Ding* (It is an obstinate and disheartening thing) he has the viola play the bass line while the soprano asks that the day’s bright and beloved radiance be clouded. The first phrase of the vocal line is accompanied along these lines by a luminous orchestra that soon darkens and then radiates anew.¹²³ Then the soprano aria in the cantata *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen* has a marvelous transparency in the crystalline harmony of the flutes and oboes that is supported only by the violins and violas while the voice sings “Jesus, I can nevertheless constantly see thy glances of grace.”¹²⁴ And the alto aria in the cantata *Schauet doch und sehet* has no other bass than the oboes da caccia, which play a unison melody of a simple motif with unaffected flourishes that moves along like a shepherd’s improvisation. The text says “Yet even in punishment, Jesus desires to be the shield and support of the righteous. He gathers them lovingly, as his sheep . . .”¹²⁵ The first and second

¹¹⁸ The violone generally had six strings: low G, C, F, A, D, and G, according to Daniel Speer in *Grundrictiger . . . Unterricht der musicalischen Kunst* (Ulm: 1697), 206, and the violone grosso descended to the C an octave lower.

¹¹⁹ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:352.

¹²⁰ BWV 33/3, mm. 1–11 et seq.

¹²¹ BWV 105/3, mm. 1–21 et seq.

¹²² BWV 170/3, mm. 1–11 et seq.

¹²³ BWV 176/3, mm. 16–20.

¹²⁴ BWV 11/8, mm. 1–32 et seq.

¹²⁵ BWV 46/5, mm. 1–11 et seq.

violins, coupled with the violas and sustained an octave below by the clavier,¹²⁶ play the bass line in the alto aria from the cantata *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*, whose unknown librettist asks of Jesus to let himself be found: "Please let my sins be no thick clouds wherein, to my horror, thou wouldst hide from me . . ." ¹²⁷ The string motifs unroll themselves in large scrolls, and the vocal line is sometimes surrounded by them, but this haze, even though continuous, remains light.

These instrumentation procedures had already been employed by Keiser who aptly excluded the low orchestral bass to achieve some bright pictorial effects, and we should note Elmira's aria in *Croesus* "Ihr stumme Fische" (Your silent fish),¹²⁸ as well as the aria in *Octavia* "Webet nicht zu laut" (Weave with toil and not too loudly).¹²⁹

Sometimes, on the contrary, the string bass, standing out with all its great depth, gives Bach important sources of descriptive sonority. For example, when the vocal bass in the cantata *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* I sings "Behold, I stand before the door and knock," the orchestral bass plays detached notes "senza l'arco" (without the bow) that repeat like blows struck at the portal,¹³⁰ and in the cantata *Nimm, was dein ist*, it imitates and darkens the discrete throbbing of the second violins and violas in the aria "Murmur not, dear Christian."¹³¹ I have already mentioned and shown some arias or recitatives where the entire orchestra quivers and where the voice of the orchestral bass is the most rumbling—even in the tumultuous arias when all the strings are playing in octaves with great rolling motifs—so it should suffice to add here the tempestuous orchestral passages found in the tenor aria from the cantata *Schau, lieber Gott*.¹³²

* * *

Winds

The wind instruments show much less suppleness and expressive diversity than the orchestral strings, and in a prolonged solo they have a monotony of

¹²⁶ There was a clavier in the organ loft where Bach performed his cantatas at Saint Thomas and Saint Nicholas churches in Leipzig (Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:157). Bach himself accompanied the *Trauer-Ode* on the clavier (Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:447). The use of this instrument in the church had been accepted for a long time. Frescobaldi, as well as Buxtehude, had already used one.

¹²⁷ BWV 154/4, mm. 1–10 et seq.

¹²⁸ Act II, scene 5.

¹²⁹ Reinhard Keiser, *Octavia*, in *Supplemente to Händelgesellschaft*, ed. Seiffert (Leipzig: 1902).

¹³⁰ BWV 61/4, mm. 1–10.

¹³¹ BWV 144/2, mm. 1–20 et seq.

¹³² BWV 153/6, mm. 1–15 et seq.

character that very quickly wears thin. At the beginning of the 18th century certain Italian composers held the winds in such mediocre esteem that they almost never used them. Pietro Torri's opera *Adelaïde*, although "lasting more than six hours," offered no variety of instruments, writes a listener who had heard it performed in Munich in January of 1723. "The violins did not have the time to notice much around them during the arias," he writes jokingly. This uniform orchestration was only altered in a single aria "that the famous Schubauer accompanied on the transverse flute."¹³³ And Scarlatti had such an aversion for the wind instruments—thinking they played very out of tune—that he only very reluctantly consented to receive the flutist Quantz.¹³⁴

Bach is far from declaring the same disdain. He gladly embraces the winds and utilizes their resources with careful ingenuity. In his writing for them, we easily recognize the same correspondences and the same groupings of ideas that we have already observed in studying the formation of his melodic and rhythmic motifs. In fact, the functioning of the imagery is more apparent when he uses instruments of rather limited capacity than when he employs the violins that express each feeling with an unconfined and spirited richness. It is not just that the violins enthrall us or that they possess a lyrical essence, but the more they shine forth through their own particular virtuosity, the more they surpass themselves and become nearly delirious in their fullest beauty. Their rapture alone makes them understood, for then they speak an indecipherable language imbued with passionate jubilations and magnificent tears. They absorb or harmonize the most contradictory motifs, and we recognize nothing beyond their textual references—only that the words have aroused an exhilaration that towers above all.

Recorders

On the other hand, the wind instruments always remain precise and have a very definite coloring. Each of them is connected to images systemized according to two particular categories—objective or subjective—with each representation being unique. So, we find here again the crisscrossing of thoughts similar to those we already observed when we established that Bach associated descending themes with words that announce repose, fatigue, downfall, or adoration. Accordingly, the flutes signify, by their soft sound, a delicate sweetness as well as a drooping weakness. Moreover, Bach uses the two varieties of flutes—the flute à bec (recorder) and the transverse flute—without showing a considerable expressive difference between them. The recorder, or flauto dolce, is the earliest used in the orchestra, and Mersenne says that recorders "represent the charm and gentleness of

¹³³ Johann Mattheson, *Crittica musica* (Hamburg: 1725), 1:254.

¹³⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurge, *Historisch-kritische Beiträge zur Aufnahme der Musik* (Berlin: 1754), 1:228.

voices.”¹³⁵ Doni, influenced by remembering older days, attributes to them a power of pathos superior to that of the strings,¹³⁶ and for Bach, recorders relate marvelously to the songs of death and arias whose words proclaim the liberated soul’s ecstatic swooning. For example, with motifs of tender harmony and languid rhythm, two recorders accompany the alto melody “Come, thou sweet hour of death, when my spirit shall feed on honey out of the lion’s mouth” in the cantata *Komm, du süsse Todesstunde*.¹³⁷

In the *Easter Oratorio*, Bach has the recorders murmur on high notes an octave above the muted violins when the tenor sings of the Christian’s sweet agony when enveloped by Jesus’s shroud.¹³⁸ He also uses them in the aria “My soul rests in Jesus’s hands” from the cantata *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr’ Mensch und Gott*,¹³⁹ but their character here is not, strictly speaking, funereal, and they exude nothing but calm and celebrate the happiness of no longer living as if in a dream. They whisper, so as not to disturb this great sleep, but they do not moan. They are also able to lull the torpor of the drowsy flock in the pasture, tinkling like bells in the distance barely shaken by the idle sheep being herded by a devoted shepherd in the secular cantata *Was mir behagt* (What pleases me).¹⁴⁰ Three recorders also undulate with the same floating pastoral character on the chords that accompany the tenor recitative and the alto aria from the cantata *Er rufet seinen Schafen mit Namen* “He calls his sheep by name . . .” and “Come, lead me; now my spirit yearns for green pastures.”¹⁴¹

Transverse Flutes

The transverse flute has essentially the same coloring as the recorder, but it is capable of more nuances. Its serenity is less impassive, and, with a greater flexibility of sound, it extends from the brightest joy all the way to sorrow. With motifs reminiscent of those in the aria from the cantata *Er rufet seinen Schafen mit Namen* that I have just cited, the transverse flute appears—engaging and tranquil—in the first chorus from the cantata *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin*.¹⁴² And in the duo from the cantata *Erwünschtes Freudenlicht*, it is also pastoral like the recorder, but less drowsy. Such are the transverse flute’s similarities with the recorder; but what it has more potential for is the fleetness of motifs that Bach

¹³⁵ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, 237.

¹³⁶ Doni, *Trattato della musica scenica*, 91.

¹³⁷ BWV 161/1, mm. 1–20 et seq. The author of the text, Salomon Franck, alludes to the biblical story of Samson through these words.

¹³⁸ BWV 249/7, mm. 1–18 et seq.

¹³⁹ BWV 127/3, mm. 1–12 et seq.

¹⁴⁰ BWV 208/9, mm. 1–17 et seq.

¹⁴¹ BWV 175/1, mm. 1–4; /2, mm. 1–21 et seq.

¹⁴² BWV 125/1, mm. 1–20 et seq.

gives it to pour out in tiny silver droplets along with its more flexible tenderness and elegance. In the first aria from the cantata *Süsser Trost*, it flows along in pleasing and supple melismas,¹⁴³ and in the tenor aria of the cantata *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut* (Lord Jesus Christ, thou highest good), it shines forth in arpeggios¹⁴⁴ as these two arias speak of consolation and mercy. The soprano aria “Out of love will my Savior die” in the *St. Matthew Passion* is also accompanied by the flute,¹⁴⁵ and in the first alto aria of that work, two flutes waft in pearly cascades when the voice sings “Thus my teardrops, pleasant spices, are brought to You, loving Jesus.”¹⁴⁶ The flute mingles rapid lines with some expressive moans in the tenor aria “Have mercy! Let thee soften my tears” in the cantata *Ich armer Mensch*,¹⁴⁷ and the same fluidity pours out over the entire tenor aria in the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele* where it is a matter of the blood of Christ expunging the sinner’s debt.¹⁴⁸

Sometimes it is the heightened clarity of the flute’s sound that is meaningful, as in the soprano recitative from the cantata *Das neugeborne Kindelein* (The new-born little child), when the soprano tells of angels filling the air with a heavenly chorus and three flutes play in harmony the melody from Cyriacus Schneegass’s chorale that has already been heard in the first chorus.¹⁴⁹

Bach is also able to find a symbol for joy in the flute’s agility, and I note here the tenor aria in the second part of the *Christmas Oratorio*¹⁵⁰ as well as the tenor aria in the cantata *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele*.¹⁵¹

In the chorus from the cantata *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen*, Bach uses a flauto piccolo, whose upper register arpeggios are combined with themes of the “world rejoicing,” while in the bass recitative that separates this chorus into two parts, the flute, on the other hand, repeats a short lamentation motif three times.¹⁵²

After making the previous observations, if we wish to put forth a judgment about the flutes’ general effect and give an overall appreciation of their role in Bach’s orchestra, we will acknowledge that the dominant characteristics of this instrument are lightness, a certain ethereal coolness, and something winged and floating—where the reflection of human feelings are clarified and transposed

¹⁴³ BWV 151/1, mm. 1–22 et seq.

¹⁴⁴ BWV 113/5, mm. 1–18 et seq.

¹⁴⁵ BWV 244/49, mm. 1–19 et seq.

¹⁴⁶ BWV 244/10, mm. 1–20 et seq. See also the preceding recitative.

¹⁴⁷ BWV 55/3, mm. 1–14 et seq. We can also cite the soprano aria from the cantata *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal* (BWV 146/5, mm. 1–20 et seq.) and the soprano aria from the second part of the *St. John Passion* (BWV 245/35, mm. 1–20 et seq.) in which the flute expresses the tears.

¹⁴⁸ BWV 78/4, mm. 1–26 et seq.

¹⁴⁹ BWV 122/3, mm. 1–16.

¹⁵⁰ BWV 248/14, mm. 1–35 et seq.

¹⁵¹ BWV 180/2, mm. 1–22 et seq.

¹⁵² BWV 103/1, mm. 1–55 et seq.; and mm. 101–109.

into a supernatural domain. Its playing is limpid, aerial, imponderable, and it sometimes seems filled with luminous phantoms—as in the angelic hymn that we have cited above that three flutes intone in chords. And I note again that in the cantata *Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir*, the flute hovers over the singing in the aria where the tenor addresses himself to the “prince of cherubs.”¹⁵³ In the cantata *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen*, the flute’s brightness symbolizes the merciful countenance of Christ whose gaze falls in beams of grace upon the faithful.¹⁵⁴ It precedes the voice like an apparition in the aria from the *St John Passion* “I follow you with joy always, and never abandon you, my light and my life,”¹⁵⁵ and it again creates a vision of God in the alto aria from the cantata *Ihr, die ihr euch von Christo nennet* (You, who do name yourselves after Christ) “Only through love and through the showing of mercy we become like God himself.”¹⁵⁶

Lastly, just as it evokes the faraway and pure beauty of the divine, the flute also conveys heaven’s threats and it supports the uttering of curses—for example, in the tenor aria from the cantata *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben* where God’s wrath is announced to the sinner who tries His great patience.¹⁵⁷

Furthermore, Bach’s flute accompaniments are clearly of an instrumental character, and they quite often demand a certain virtuosic ability. As we have already said, he is happy to write rapid lines and arpeggios for it, not satisfied with only giving it a simple melodic line. For Mattheson, however, the “German flute” was the orchestral voice that was most like the well-formed and well-managed human voice, and “as a result,” he wrote, “it is highly esteemed if it is played with discernment.”¹⁵⁸ The examples from Bach’s work that I have enumerated show us that he used the flute more, perhaps, for describing than for moving us, and although he uses it to picture external objects with a well-determined feeling, the flute contributes to that feeling less by inflection than by coloring. Mersenne speaks of the flute’s “bleak and somber sweetness,”¹⁵⁹ but this characterization is too limiting of the expressive power of the instrument, and we know that Bach granted it a portion of joy. We also know that through its upper-register wailings he unleashes in our imaginations the terror of an approaching hurricane. And if it also remains the graveside mourner par excellence—especially through the recorder—we must not forget that amidst its tears it already heralds the blessed indifference of those bound for eternal glory.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ BWV 130/5, mm. 1–18 et seq.

¹⁵⁴ BWV 182/5, mm. 1–22 et seq. See also /7, mm. 1–66 et seq.

¹⁵⁵ BWV 245/9, mm. 1–20 et seq.

¹⁵⁶ BWV 164/e, mm. 1–17 et seq.

¹⁵⁷ BWV 102/5, mm. 1–32 et seq.

¹⁵⁸ Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre*, 270.

¹⁵⁹ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, 237.

¹⁶⁰ Recall here the aria “Eternity’s sapphire house,” previously cited from the *Trauer-Ode* (BWV 198/8, mm. 1–33 et seq.) and the cantata *Gottes Zeit* (BWV 106/4, mm. 1–14 et seq.).

Oboes

In contrast to the pallid flutes, the oboes have a warm and intense sound, and, as Mersenne says, “even though they seem strident, they have a natural gaiety that makes them preferable.”¹⁶¹ In another chapter, he also states that their playing “is suited to large audiences . . . because of the great noise that they make . . . for they have the loudest and most penetrating sound of all the instruments, with the exception of the trumpet.”¹⁶² Bach puts this fiery sonority to good use—especially in the arias where he writes parts for several oboes, and we frequently meet such an orchestration in arias where he wants to unfurl a sumptuous harmony without recourse to the din of the trumpets. Three oboes accompany the bass when he sings “A prince is, like Pan, the beneficent god of his lands” in the cantata *Was mir behagt*,¹⁶³ and the same rich sound is coupled with the tenor aria “God, for whom the earth’s circle is too small, whom neither world nor heaven can contain, chooses to be in the cramped manger. If this eternal light appears to us, then God will henceforth not hate us, for we are now the children of this light” from the cantata *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*.¹⁶⁴ He assembles three oboes again for the melodies about acts of solemn thanks and good wishes that the soprano expresses in two cantatas for the Christmas season—the cantata for the Sunday after the Nativity, *Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende*¹⁶⁵ and the cantata for the Circumcision feast *Jesu, nun sei gepreiset*.¹⁶⁶ God’s protection¹⁶⁷ and His righteousness¹⁶⁸ are also celebrated with the oboes’ bright light; but in these cases, as on other occasions that I have already pointed out, their strong glare becomes threatening. For instance, in the bass aria from the cantata *Nimm von uns, Herr, du treuer Gott* (Take from us, O Lord, thou faithful God), three oboes crackle in fiery swirls to symbolize flames of divine wrath cast upon us,¹⁶⁹ and two oboes inject their bitter turmoil into the terrifying aria from the cantata *Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes* where the bass declaims “Infernal serpent, becomest thou not fearful? The one who crushes thy head as victor is now born.”¹⁷⁰ In the cantata *Herr Christ*,

¹⁶¹ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, 11.

¹⁶² Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, 303.

¹⁶³ BWV 208/7, mm. 1–14 et seq. The same aria is used with words of a similar feeling in the cantata *Also hat Gott* (BWV 68/4, mm. 1–12 et seq.).

¹⁶⁴ BWV 91/3, mm. 1–13 et seq.

¹⁶⁵ BWV 28/1, mm. 1–16 et seq. Two oboes also accompany the aria of thanks sung by the tenor in the cantata *Uns ist ein kind geboren* (BWV 142/5, mm. 1–16 et seq.). [This cantata was not composed by Bach but perhaps by Johann Kuhnau according to Unger, *Handbook*, 490.—Trans.]

¹⁶⁶ BWV 41/2, mm. 1–22 et seq.

¹⁶⁷ Cantata *Falsche Welt* (BWV 52/5, mm. 1–20 et seq.).

¹⁶⁸ Cantata *O Ewigkeit* (BWV 20/5, mm. 1–23 et seq.).

¹⁶⁹ BWV 101/4, mm. 1–17 et seq.

¹⁷⁰ BWV 40/4, mm. 1–20 et seq.

einges Gottes Sohn, they alternate with the violins, augmenting through this contrast in coloring the uncertain feeling that the opposition of motifs brings to life at the beginning of the bass aria “Now to the right, now to the left, turns my wayward step.”¹⁷¹

This concord of oboes sometimes has a uniquely pictorial value, as in the aria from the cantata *Ich bin ein guter Hirt* in which they echo each other with pastoral musettes.¹⁷² Also, in certain cases, the *edge* of the two oboes’ sound—which can also be joined by a third voice of the same family—serves mainly to reinforce the violins’ and violas’ sonority, and this procedure gives the first chorus of the cantata *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt* a more fiery hue.¹⁷³ Bach similarly orchestrates the first chorus from the cantata *Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht*.¹⁷⁴ It is a device frequently used by composers of Bach’s era for enriching the strings, and they also achieved changes of sonority and quite contrasting nuances by only allowing the oboes to play during the ritornellos and interludes. Everything that is only accompaniment remains in the background so that the voices are better heard, and the violins, usually few in number,¹⁷⁵ gain a fuller strength when the oboes double them in the passages where the orchestra plays alone. Wilhelm Kleefeld points out this union of oboes and violins in the operas by Steffani (1695 and 1696) and in *Adonis* by Keiser (1697).¹⁷⁶ We should also note the aria “Ruhig sein” (Be quiet) from Keiser’s opera *Octavia* (1705).¹⁷⁷

Considered as an instrumental vocalist, the oboe is the great soloist of pathos in Bach’s orchestra, whose pre-eminent lyrical soloist is the violin. In the soprano aria from the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, the oboe introduces the voice’s lament and continues to maintain a dialog of sighs and sobs with it;¹⁷⁸ and, accompanied by the strings in the bass aria from the cantata *Sehet, wir gehn hinauf*, it is in fact the oboe that expresses the pain of consummate sacrifice.¹⁷⁹ Right from the beginning of the soprano aria in the cantata *Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht*, it expresses with broken motifs all the faltering soul’s anguish,¹⁸⁰ and it weeps once more when the singer asks her tears to cease in the cantata *Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgethan II* (Whatever God does, that is done well).¹⁸¹ In the cantata *Jesus nahm zu sich die Zwölfe und sprach* (Jesus took to himself the twelve and said) (1723),

¹⁷¹ BWV 96/5, mm. 1–16 et seq.

¹⁷² BWV 85/3, mm. 1–22 et seq.

¹⁷³ BWV 68/1, mm. 1–12 et seq.

¹⁷⁴ BWV 186/1, mm. 1–12 et seq.

¹⁷⁵ See Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:75, and in an article by Wilhelm Kleefeld, “Das Orchester der Hamburger Oper 1678–1738,” *Sammelbände der I. M. G.* (Leipzig: 1899), 1: 226.

¹⁷⁶ Kleefeld, *Sammelbände der I. M. G.*, 1:226.

¹⁷⁷ Keiser, *Octavia*, in *Supplemente to Händelgesellschaft* (VI).

¹⁷⁸ BWV 21/2, mm. 1–18 et seq.

¹⁷⁹ BWV 159/4, mm. 1–23 et seq.

¹⁸⁰ BWV 105/3, mm. 1–21 et seq.

¹⁸¹ BWV 98/3, mm. 1–48 et seq.

when the alto implores Jesus, the oboe is coupled with her impassioned prayer “My Jesus, draw me to thee; I am prepared, I will depart from here and go to Jerusalem to thy passion.”¹⁸² All these examples show us an oboe that communicates through a more intensely penetrating sound than the voice—a sound that is nearly as intelligible as well. Mattheson says with some justice that the oboe is, so to speak, a “talking” instrument.¹⁸³

Oboes d'Amore

The oboe d'amore is an instrument that had recently come into use when Bach adopted it in his orchestra. It had been known “around 1720,” says Ph. Eisel in his *Musicus αὐτοδίδακτος* (Erfurt: 1738),¹⁸⁴ and it is softer than the ordinary oboe, descending a third lower down to A. Kleefeld says that Telemann used it as early as 1722 in his *Sieg der Schönheit* (Triumph of beauty), and we encounter it in some of Bach's works written around the years Eisel mentions: the cantatas *Nur Jedem das Seine!*,¹⁸⁵ *Die Elenden sollen essen* (The afflicted shall eat),¹⁸⁶ *Sehet, welch eine Liebe*,¹⁸⁷ and *Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes*.¹⁸⁸ In this last work, dated by Spitta from 1723, the oboe d'amore accompanies, along with the viola da gamba, the alto aria “Love, ye Christians, in deed.” It also figures in the tenor aria from the cantata *Ich lasse dich nicht* (I relinquish thee not), composed for the funeral service of Johann Christian von Ponickau (6 February 1727),¹⁸⁹ and it appears again in the tenor aria “Love gradually draws its beloved with soft footsteps” from the cantata *Schwingt freudig euch empor* (Soar joyfully aloft).¹⁹⁰ The oboe d'amore also joins the violoncello piccolo in the soprano aria “I am glorious, I am lovely, to impassion my Savior” from the cantata *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen*.¹⁹¹ Lastly, due to the charm of its sonority—for which it was named—it bedecks Phoebus's tender aria with flowers in the *Dramma per Musica* entitled *Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan* (The contest between Phoebus and Pan).¹⁹²

¹⁸² BWV 22/2, mm. 1–15 et seq.

¹⁸³ Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre*, 268. He calls it “Der gleichsam redende Hautbois” (The quasi-speaking oboe).

¹⁸⁴ Cited by Kleefeld, *Sammelbände der I. M. G.*, 1:264.

¹⁸⁵ BWV 163/1, mm. 1–23 et seq.

¹⁸⁶ BWV 75/5, mm. 1–38 et seq.

¹⁸⁷ BWV 64/7, mm. 1–38 et seq.

¹⁸⁸ BWV 76/12, mm. 1–23 et seq.

¹⁸⁹ BWV 157/2, mm. 1–44 et seq.

¹⁹⁰ BWV 36/3, mm. 1–20 et seq.

¹⁹¹ BWV 49/4, mm. 1–22 et seq.

¹⁹² BWV 201/5, mm. 1–32 et seq. See also Pomona's aria in *Der zufriedengestellte Aeolus* (BWV 205/7, mm. 1–12 et seq.).

Similar to an alto voice, tender and deep, this oboe also sings of forsaken love and the mourning for the loss of compassionate friendship. For example, in the tenor aria from the cantata *Du Hirte Israël, höre*, two oboes d'amore intertwine their weary motifs and their melancholy melismas with the singing of the words "If my shepherd hides himself too long, and if the desert makes me all too anxious;"¹⁹³ and then, in the cantata *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*, their haze wafts over the alto aria "Jesus, please let thyself be found, please let my sins be no thick clouds wherein to my horror thou wouldst hide from me."¹⁹⁴ They undulate in spacious consonances in the soprano recitative "Though my heart is flooded with tears, when Jesus departs from me" from the *St. Matthew Passion*,¹⁹⁵ and in the tenor aria from the cantata *Liebster Emmanuel*, they cast a somber purple hue around the melody that proclaims the "hard journey of the cross and the bitter fare of tears."¹⁹⁶

Oboes da Caccia

The oboes da caccia—even lower than the oboes d'amore—resound in anguished nocturnal wails with the obstinate bitterness of a death knell in the alto recitative "Ah, accursed Golgotha!" from the *St. Matthew Passion*, and their hollow, quasi-metallic harmony echoes through the following aria.¹⁹⁷ They also unite with the beseeching soprano aria in the cantata *Siehe zu, dass deine Gottesfurcht nicht Heuchelei sei* (Take heed, that thy piety not be hypocrisy).¹⁹⁸ But their purpose is quite different in the tenor aria from the cantata for the election of the Leipzig council *Preise, Jerusalem, den Herrn* (Praise, O Jerusalem, the Lord) (1723).¹⁹⁹ There, in pompous rhythms, they have the slightly awkward grace of a workman in formal attire.

Bassoon

The bassoon—quite often used to reinforce the bass—plays on its own in several arias that it somehow darkens by draping a bunting of its roving motifs around the voices, and we find the most remarkable example of this hazy orchestration in the duet from the cantata *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange*. The voices say "You must believe, you must hope, you must be patient in God! Jesus

¹⁹³ BWV 104/3, mm. 1–22 et seq.

¹⁹⁴ BWV 154/4, mm. 1–16 et seq.

¹⁹⁵ BWV 244/18, mm. 1–8 et seq.

¹⁹⁶ BWV 123/3, mm. 1–12 et seq.

¹⁹⁷ BWV 244/69, mm. 1–15; /70, mm. 1–11 et seq.

¹⁹⁸ BWV 179/5, mm. 1–17 et seq.

¹⁹⁹ BWV 119/3, mm. 1–17 et seq.

knows the right hour to gladden you with his help. When the troubled time has passed away, then his whole heart stands open to you,” and all along the bassoon paints whorls that continually follow each other like low clouds in a storm at twilight (ex. 6.8).²⁰⁰



Ex. 6.8. *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange*, BWV 155/2, mm. 1–3.

In the alto and tenor duet of the cantata *Man singet mit Freuden vom sieg* (They sing with joy of victory), the bassoon weaves ghostly veils in accompanying the words “Be watchful, ye holy watchmen, the night is almost gone.”²⁰¹ And, combined with the cello,²⁰² it provides the instrumental grounding for the soprano and tenor duet in the cantata *Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbaths* where it has poured forth all along in somber melismas since the opening *Sinfonia*.²⁰³

In contrast to these effects in shading, the bassoon can have a great sonorous power when played soberly and at full volume. For example, in the “*Quoniam tu solus sanctus*” (Thou alone art holy) from the *Mass in B Minor*, two bassoons and a horn compose a robust wind ensemble.²⁰⁴ And in the cantata *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele I*, Bach uses the bassoon to play the bass line in the aria accompanied by three corni da caccia (hunting horns) “The Lord is king eternally.”²⁰⁵ So, considering these examples, we see that Bach did not neglect this brilliant quality of the bassoon that Mattheson would doubtlessly consider to be fundamental to the instrument, since he calls it none other than “the proud bassoon.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁰ This passage, which contains some rather rapid notes, would have singularly perplexed the bassoon player mentioned by F. E. Niedt in *Musicalisches ABC* (Hamburg: 1708), 17, who, he says, had never before encountered thirty-second notes in music written for his instrument.

²⁰¹ BWV 149/6, mm. 1–16 et seq.

²⁰² Kleefeld points out similar combinations in some operas performed in Hamburg at the beginning of the 18th century (Kleefeld, *Sammelbände der I. M. G.*, 268).

²⁰³ BWV 42/4, mm. 1–12 et seq.

²⁰⁴ BWV 232/11, mm. 1–32 et seq.

²⁰⁵ BWV 143/5, mm. 1–28 et seq.

²⁰⁶ Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre*, 269.

Trumpets

It would hardly be necessary to emphasize the role of the trumpets in Bach's orchestra if he had always confined himself to hurling them into bright fanfares in the stately and joyous works. To be sure, he makes sumptuous use of them, and it suffices to cite the superb arpeggios of the three trumpets in the first chorus from the cantata *Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir*,²⁰⁷ or their chords in the cantatas *Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille*,²⁰⁸ *Unser Mund sei voll Lachens*,²⁰⁹ *Gelobet sei der Herr, mein Gott*,²¹⁰ *Jesu, nun sei gepreiset*,²¹¹ *O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe* (O eternal fire, O fount of love),²¹² *Wir danken dir*,²¹³ etc., and we should note as well that he used them magnificently in the cantata composed in 1708 for the Mühlhausen council election *Gott ist mein König*.²¹⁴ Without lingering to list the works where the chorus of trumpets shines forth, and without even pointing out the arias where the solo trumpet contends nimbly and joyfully with the voice, I would like to note the compositions where Bach departs from custom²¹⁵ and no longer chooses the trumpet as herald of a celebration but as terrifying messenger. In the bass aria from the cantata *Schauet doch und sehet*, it flashes "like a beam of sunlight streaming through a storm cloud, and it gives off a blood-red color," as has been so concisely noted.²¹⁶ The words of this aria are "Thy storm

²⁰⁷ BWV 130/1, mm. 1–25 et seq.

²⁰⁸ BWV 120/2, mm. 1–23 et seq.

²⁰⁹ BWV 110/1, mm. 1–13 et seq.

²¹⁰ BWV 129/1, mm. 1–20 et seq.

²¹¹ BWV 41/1, mm. 1–16 et seq.

²¹² BWV 34/1, mm. 1–14 et seq.

²¹³ BWV 29/1, mm. 1–11 et seq.

²¹⁴ BWV 71/1, mm. 1–7. In the cantata *Denn du wirst meine Seele nicht in der Hölle lassen* (BWV 15/1, mm. 6–25) Bach uses two clarini (octave trumpets) sustained on the tonic. Cf. Speer, *Grundrichtiger . . . Unterricht der musicalischen Kunst* (1697), 210. Spitta considers this cantata as the oldest that we have from Bach; he assumes that it dates back to the Easter celebration of 1704 (*J. S. Bach*, 1:227). [This cantata was composed by Johann Ludwig Bach according to Unger, *Handbook*, 51.—Trans.]

²¹⁵ Johann Beer (or Behr, 1655–1700), in *Musicalische Discourse* (1719), 158, made note that the trumpet can be extremely woeful in certain cases—when we ask soldiers to play the "call for the dead," and announce "the lost skirmish." It suffices, he adds, to place the melody in agreement with the text.

²¹⁶ Ernst Otto Lindner, *Zur Tonkunst* (1864), 124, and Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:260. Moreover, Bach designated a particular instrument here—the tromba, or corno di tirarsi—an instrument equipped with slides like a trombone. The tromba da tirarsi plays with the soprano in the choruses from the cantatas *O Ewigkeit* (BWV 20/1, mm. 13–26) and *Wo soll ich fliehen hin* (BWV 5/1, mm. 19–27). The corno da tirarsi is also indicated for the same use in the choruses from the cantata *Halt im Gedächtnis* (BWV 67/4, mm. 1–18; /7, mm. 1–9), and it appears again in the cantata *Ach! ich sehe itzt, da ich zur Hochzeit gehe* (BWV 162/1, mm. 1–18 et seq.; /6, mm. 1–12).

drew on from afar, yet its flash will finally break forth,”²¹⁷ and its introduction concludes on a note held for two measures by the trumpet where the voice, on the second measure, begins singing the trumpet’s initial motif formed of ascending thirds.²¹⁸

We find a counterpart to this formidable aria in one from the cantata *Es reisset euch ein schrecklich Ende*: “Thus the avenging judge in his zeal will extinguish the flame of his Word as punishment.”²¹⁹ However, even with the same growling in the quivering basses, the fierce orchestral unisons, and the greater agitation, this aria does not equal the sinister beauty of the former, in which the trumpet, with the calm severity of the Almighty, relentlessly hammers out its even notes and its long, oppressive clamors. It is also the trumpet that howls hell’s rage in the bass aria “Be silent, hell’s host” from the cantata *Wo soll ich fliehen hin*.²²⁰

Horns

Bach sometimes uses the corno da caccia (hunting horn/French horn) to give the arias of power a forceful and slightly solemn coloring. For instance, he presents the horn in trumpet-like motifs in the soprano aria from the cantata *Wär Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit* (Were God not with us in this time),²²¹ and we have noted his use of it in multiple parts along with the bassoon. He also combines two horns with three trumpets and kettledrums in the resounding aria from the *Dramma per Musica*: *Der zufriedengestellte Äolus* in which Aeolus sings “Back, back, winged winds.”²²²

He uses horns to illustrate hunting scenes, and they appear in the middle of the the bass aria that begins the cantata *Siehe, ich will viel Fishcher aussenden* when the singer bids “And thereafter I will send out many hunters.”²²³ They first sound there in repeated chords, and then they echo the vocal themes with consonant hunting calls. In the first aria from the secular cantata *Was mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd* two horns accompany the soprano,²²⁴ and in the choruses from the cantatas *Der Herr ist mein getreuer Hirt* (The Lord is my faithful shepherd)²²⁵ and *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* (How beautiful shines the

²¹⁷ BWV 46/3, mm. 1–21 et seq.

²¹⁸ See ex. 2.37a and preceding text.

²¹⁹ BWV 90/3, mm. 1–18 et seq.

²²⁰ BWV 5/5, mm. 1–22 et seq.

²²¹ BWV 14/2, mm. 1–34 et seq.

²²² BWV 205/11, mm. 1–37 et seq. In *Octavia* by Keiser, two *cornes de chasses* (hunting horns) accompany Nero’s aria “La Roma trionfante.”

²²³ BWV 88/1, mm. 101–116 et seq.

²²⁴ BWV 208/2, mm. 1–27 et seq.

²²⁵ BWV 112/1, mm. 1–23 et seq.

morning star)²²⁶ we could say that the horns add the impression of a forested background to the pastoral countryside that Bach is suggesting there.

This instrument that Mattheson calls “pleasantly stately”²²⁷ strays severely from such a description in the troubled aria that opens the cantata *Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim?* (O Ephraim, what shall I make of thee?)²²⁸ where, as we have seen so often in Bach, the motif stressed at the beginning is made up of repeated notes whose uniformity coincides with ideas of duty, tenacity, and purpose.²²⁹ But when God’s vengeance dissolves into mercy, the threatening horn remains silent. In the first chorus of the cantata *Herr, wie du willst* the horn puts forth an inflexible four-note motif in separated notes (Bach has marked “staccato” on the part) borrowed from the chorale sung by the voices, and it is repeated continually with an imperious obstinacy that brings to mind the immutable achievement of divine will.²³⁰

Trombones

The choruses of some cantatas are accompanied by several trombone parts, and we find that four trombones reinforce the four voice parts in the first chorus and final chorale from the cantata *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*.²³¹ The same orchestration appears in the cantata *Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein*,²³² and three trombones join the bottom three voice parts in the last chorus from the cantata *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt*²³³ while the soprano is joined by the cornet. A similar instrumentation—with the oboe d’amore added to the soprano part—is used in the cantata *Christum wir sollen loben schon* (We shall praise Christ sweetly).²³⁴ Then, the trombones, cornet, and two liti²³⁵ compose the entire orchestra of the cantata *O Jesu Christ, meins Lebens Licht* (O Jesu-Christ, light of my life).²³⁶ But we should also note that most of the choruses accompanied in this

²²⁶ BWV 1/1, mm. 1–18 et seq. In Keiser’s *Inganno fedele*, the *cornetti di caccia* (hunting cornets), designated by the text, appear in Silvanire’s air “Das schallende Wald-horn ermuntert die Brust,” 1:4.

²²⁷ Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre*, 267.

²²⁸ BWV 89/1, mm. 1–11 et seq.

²²⁹ See exs. 2.4a, b and preceding text.

²³⁰ BWV 73/1, mm. 1–5. Moreover, this motif resembles one of the duty motifs that I have already pointed out.

²³¹ BWV 38/1, mm. 8–24 et seq.; /6, mm. 1–13.

²³² BWV 2/1, mm. 1–25 et seq.

²³³ BWV 68/5, mm. 1–13 et seq.

²³⁴ BWV 121/1, mm. 1–27 et seq.

²³⁵ These instruments were undoubtedly a kind of trumpet. See the preface by A. Dörffel to vol. 24 of the *Bach-Gesellschaft*, p. xxxvi.

²³⁶ BWV 118/1, mm. 1–19 et seq. [This work has only one movement and is classified as a motet according to Boyd, *Bach*, 168.—Trans.]

manner are written in motet form, and, with this simple yet imposing orchestration, Bach revived one of the resources of older German music. Mattheson writes, in his treatise *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, that it is quite astonishing to see the trombones with their magnificent sound abandoned, and he extols the powerfully crafted compositions where Rosenmüller writes for them in four parts.²³⁷ Elsewhere, he speaks of the sumptuous sonority of the trombones that he says are rarely used outside the church.²³⁸

Cornet

As for the cornet—which we also meet in several cantatas that I have just mentioned—Mattheson treats it less favorably. He also considers it a church instrument, but he seems glad that, in the era when he writes, he “only has to see it rarely.” In fact, for him this hard-toned instrument rather resembles from a distance “a crudely managed harsh human voice.”²³⁹ However, some eighty years earlier, Mersenne deemed it quite otherwise and declared that the hunting cornet used “in vocal performances and with the organ to play the treble” was delightful, and he added this lovely image: “As for the sound that it produces, it is similar to the bursting forth of a ray of sunlight that appears in the shade or darkness when one hears it played amidst the singing in the great cathedrals or chapels.”²⁴⁰ In Bach’s orchestra the cornet sometimes also plays the soprano part, with only the trombones accompanying the rest of the choir, and this alone shows us that he never regarded the cornet only as a complement to the group formed by the latter. So, in the cantata *Ich freue mich in dir*, we find a charming orchestration effect in the use of the cornet coupled with the voice while the oboe d’amore is united with the violins. These instruments prolong a vocal note—the cornet with the soprano, and the second oboe d’amore with the violas an octave below—but this held note does not occur because a verse is ending or because this grouping of sounds is produced by any chance interplay in the orchestral counterpoint. We only need to read the text to understand that Bach sought a rare and charming effect here by not wanting the voices to sing in vain “Ah, what a sweet sound!”²⁴¹ So it seems, then, that he was of the same opinion about the cornet as Mersenne.

²³⁷ Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 84.

²³⁸ Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre*, 266.

²³⁹ Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre*, 269.

²⁴⁰ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, 274. We can cite again the choruses accompanied by cornet and trombones in the cantatas *Sehet, welch eine Liebe* (BWV 64/1, mm. 1–30 et seq.), *Nimm von uns* (BWV 101/1, mm. 30–48 et seq.), *Christ lag in Todes Banden* (BWV 4/2, mm. 1–8 et seq.), etc.

²⁴¹ BWV 133/1, mm. 14–23 et seq.

Lute

If we now look at how Bach uses the instruments generally destined for the accompaniment, we recognize that he also bears their expressive coloring in mind. For instance, we have already seen how the lutes' droning is mixed with the strings' quivering to represent the bells' vibrations in the *Trauer-Ode*—as in the chourses and two arias of this work, where the lutes still continue to waft in transparent and melancholy harmonies as if to beckon the orchestra and the voices to remain discrete for fear of stifling their murmuring. It would have been impossible to make out their light playing—I won't even say to hear them distinctly—if the whole ensemble of flutes, oboes d'amore, strings, violas da gamba, and singers did not constantly maintain a fine, grayish tint.²⁴² Sylvius Leopold Weiss, lutenist for the Dresden court, actually wrote to Mattheson in 1723 "The lute would surely be too weak and imperceptible to participate in an orchestral accompaniment, although at marriage festivities celebrated here, I have accompanied the famous opera singer, Bercelli, in an "aria con liuto solo" (aria with solo lute) that must have given a good impression. But, in the first place, I had an excellent lute; secondly, the aria is very brilliantly written for the instrument; and furthermore, nothing is combined with it but the clavier and double bass, which, moreover, play only the principle notes of the bass line."²⁴³

Clavier and Organ

In the *St. John Passion*, the lute, with two violas d'amore, accompanies the bass arioso "Bertrachte, meine Seel" (Consider, my soul),²⁴⁴ and in the absence of the lute, Bach had the clavier play this part.²⁴⁵ Mattheson saw in the clavier an instrument nearly indispensable for church, theatre, and chamber music, and he observed with astonishment that in Hamburg the custom had been preserved of playing accompaniments in the churches on "the shrill and repellent regales (small reed organs)," when "the harmonious and twittering murmur of the clavier . . . has an infinitely more beautiful effect upon the choir."²⁴⁶ We have already seen that Bach sat at the clavier to direct the cantatas, and we should remember that he explicitly designated that it be played in the alto aria from the cantata *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*.²⁴⁷ An obbligato clavier part appears in the secular cantata *Amore*

²⁴² BWV 198/1, mm. 1–14 et seq.

²⁴³ Johann Mattheson, *Der neue Gottingische, aber viel schlechter, als die alten Lacedämonischen, urtheilende Ephorus* (Hamburg: 1727), 118.

²⁴⁴ BWV 245/19, mm. 1–18.

²⁴⁵ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:363.

²⁴⁶ Mattheson, *Das neu eröffnete Orchestra*, 263.

²⁴⁷ BWV 154/4, mm. 1–10 et seq.

traditore (Traitorous love)—that is to say, the clavier does not just play the bass line while improvising the harmony from the figures marked, but it executes along with the bass an accompaniment made up of particular motifs.²⁴⁸ It is in this vein that we also understand Bach's indication "organo obligato" that appears in a certain number of cantatas. In these works, the organ, which generally realizes the basso continuo on stops of moderate sonority,²⁴⁹ accomplishes a more prominent task and acts as an orchestral instrument. Bach uses the organ obligato in the cantata *Gott ist mein König* (1708),²⁵⁰ and in the second aria from the cantata *Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust* in which it has two melodic parts on separate manuals. And I will mention here only the instances where Bach specifies the organ registrations—whether used as obligato or not—for giving a particular hue to the accompaniment. Their number is brief: in the first chorus of the cantata *Ein feste Burg*, he indicates to the organist to draw the 16 foot pedal posauene (trumpet),²⁵¹ and in the first chorus from the *St Matthew Passion*, he says that the melody from the chorale *O Lamm Gottes* (O lamb of God) must be given the clear sonority of the sesquialtera,²⁵² which he also indicates for playing the chorale in the first aria of the cantata *Komm, du süsse Todesstunde*.²⁵³ Lastly, Bach annotates an organ part written for replacing the lute in the arioso from the *St. John Passion* "to be played on the organ with the eight- and four-foot bourdons."²⁵⁴

²⁴⁸ BWV 203/3, mm. 1–24 et seq.

²⁴⁹ Cf. *L'Orgue de J. S. Bach* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1895). [This book by Pirro was translated into English by Wallace Goodrich under the title *Johann Sebastian Bach, the organist and his works for the organ* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1902).—Trans.]

²⁵⁰ BWV 71/2, mm. 1–24 et seq.

²⁵¹ BWV 80/1, mm. 24–31 et seq.

²⁵² BWV 244/1, mm. 30–37 et seq.

²⁵³ BWV 161/1, mm. 13–17 et seq.

²⁵⁴ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:363. To complete this study—the technical information for which space could not be found without overloading this already highly developed chapter—I refer the reader back to the previously cited article that Kleefeld has published in the second installment of the *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* (1900), 219. One can also read the *Histoire de l'Instrumentation* by Henri Lavoix (1878), the *Catalogue . . . du Musée du Conservatoire . . . de Bruxelles*, ed. Victor Mahillon (1893), and the work of Antoine Vidal, *Les instruments à archet* (1876–78).

CHAPTER SEVEN

INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT

“Word for word” practices of the early masters. – How Bach obeys the suggestions of the words. – Procedures of his style. – Repetition of words. – Repetition of motifs. – Insistence. – Progression. – Important words. – Expressive role of the vocal lines. – Major and minor modes. – The different voices.

“Word for Word” Practices of the Early Masters

We have now finished studying Bach’s vocabulary, and we know the components of his language—how he translates words into melody, harmony, rhythm, and coloring. But even though we possess the lexicon of his poetics, we must remember that his metaphors are not all new and that most of his forms are renovations, not original creations. From an artistic standpoint, however, our work thus far has something sacrilegious about it. We have had to ruin all the synthetic power of the music, divide its coherent beauty, break up its lines and desiccate its charm. From prophetic hymns, we have had to extract an infantile word-for-word correlation. We have taken this expressive whole, in which feeling overflows, complex and alive—where all our long string of epithets has failed to capture all at once—and we have broken it up into the separate images that are usually united within it. But we are now going to attempt to re-establish, in their sequence, the waves of this eloquent current that we have disrupted. It means little to know that Bach’s work is bursting with symbols. Age-old craft is woven into it, but we would be singularly wrong to attribute Bach’s particular genius—through which he held

the greatest position of his epoch—to the typical attributes of a musician born in the 17th century. Observing that Bach uses the same allegorical formulas as his predecessors and his contemporaries is hardly enough to demonstrate that his work expresses intense and profound feeling. But we will try to learn how he uses these common recipes and how he ennobles them through appropriation. After having determined the roots of his language, we must use them to understand his rhetoric.

How Bach Obeys the Suggestions of the Words

First, we must ask how he applies the meaningful motifs, harmonies, and rhythms whose interpretive value is obvious from our examinations thus far. The resources of his verbal treasure are seemingly unlimited, and we need to know if he uses them constantly by translating each word of the text with a word from his musical dictionary and not letting a single allusion pass by without a choice or an ordering so that all the details in a composition will follow the same plan. Forkel—a friend of Bach's two eldest sons, Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emmanuel—assures us that, as a guiding principle, Bach had a devotion to the general effect of the words, and never to their individual expression.¹ But do we see in Forkel's statement a distinct description of Bach's method, or simply a reflection of Forkel's own opinion, ascribing to the master he admires the procedure he himself judges most rational? I could readily believe that Forkel, or Bach's sons, in their worship of the great musician, attributed this doctrine to him if we did not quite often find in the works of the masters contradictions of the precepts Forkel and Bach's sons professed. Besides, even if Bach had declared himself on this point and had advised his composition pupils to heed the overall substance of the text more than its isolated words, he had not established a new rule as one might wish to think. In a work published in 1696, Wolfgang Caspar Printz—otherwise known for his historical writings²—counsels composers not only to observe the generalized meaning of the text for which they wish to compose, but also to illustrate each word “so that the notes appear to restate what the words mean.” But to this general remark, which at first appears to contradict the precept attributed to Bach, Printz adds a paragraph that contains exactly the same instruction as Forkel's text: “But if a soulful emotion must be expressed, the composer will have more regard for this than for the individual words—not that he cannot take them into account, but he must not specifically express words that are opposed to the emotion he is acting upon. For it would be silly to compose only sad music to the lines ‘Cede dolor, cede mœror, lachrymaeque flentium’ (Abandon

¹ Johann Nicholas Forkel, *Über J. S. Bachs-Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig: 1802), 35.

² Wolfgang C. Printz, *Historische Beschreibung der edelen Sing-und Kling-Kunst* (Dresden: 1690).

pain, abandon grief, tears, and weeping) just because of the words ‘dolor,’ ‘mœror,’ and ‘lachrymaeque flentium’ while the text as a whole breathes with joy.”³ In part three of his *Comparaison de la Musique italienne et de la Musique française* (1706), Lecerf de la Viéville has us note that, contrary to this sensible prescription, Campra sins, in his *In exitu Israël de Ægypto* (When Israel went out of Egypt), “by awkwardly responding to the Latin meaning” when he composes a duet “that cries out at length and in full voice” to the words from the psalm “non clamabunt” (they do not cry out).⁴ Johann Mattheson very often expounds similar ideas. In the second volume of his *Critica musica* he writes that music must strive to “enlighten and animate our thoughts rather than to adorn the words.”⁵ Elsewhere, he derides the composer who adapts a “heroic” melody to the text “The master of the world has not appeared to reign, but to serve.”⁶ He also deems it useful to note—in the second part of his treatise *Der volkommene Capellmeister*—that a phrase speaking of “keeping tears from the eye represents consolation, not weeping, and is not suited for a lament,” and he adds that “the words ‘I suppress joy, and have no laughter in my heart’ would sound wrong if one chose to write runs or leaping notes on ‘joy’ and ‘laughter.’”⁷ The last of these Mattheson citations is from 1739, and the first is from 1725. Bach had already been writing for a long time; so only Printz could have had an influence on him during the period when his style was still forming—an influence that we must admit was not strong enough to prevent his frequently falling into the abuse that Printz so severely condemns.

In fact, Bach often allows himself to be preoccupied with the image suggested by a single word—to the point of forgetting the overall idea. Certain words are so directly linked to precise motifs that he abandons himself without hesitation to the impulses evoked by from them and instantly reacts. Examples of a word’s immediate influence abound. For instance, in the first alto recitative from the *Christmas Oratorio*, on the words “abandon thy weeping now,” we find a very characteristic motif of lamentation accompanied by diminished seventh chords.⁸ Then, at the end of the first bass recitative of the cantata *Wachet! betet!* the melodic line is colored mournfully with accidentals, and the rhythm labors on the word “zaget” (be dismayed)—even though its meaning is transformed by a negative: “Therefore, be not dismayed.”⁹ In the recitative—so righteous in tone—

³ Wolfgang C. Printz, *Phrynidis Mytilenaei oder des satyrischen Componistens* (Dresden and Leipzig: 1696), 1:114.

⁴ Jean-Louis Lecerf de la Viéville, *Comparaison de la Musique italienne, et de la Musique française* (Brussels: 1704), 135.

⁵ Mattheson, *Critica musica* (Hamburg: 1725), 295.

⁶ Johann Mattheson, *Der neue Göttingische aber viel schlechter, als die allen Lacedämonischen urtheilende Ephorus* (Hamburg: 1727), 92.

⁷ Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg: 1739), 201.

⁸ BWV 248/3, mm. 9–10.

⁹ BWV 70/2, mm. 13–18.

that begins the cantata *Mein Gott, wie lang*, a bright vocal line is developed on the word “Freuden” (joy) when the text says that the wine of joy is lacking.¹⁰ And in a recitative from the Ascension oratorio *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*, Bach joins a sequence of ascending notes to the words “turned around toward Jerusalem *away from the mountain*”—a climbing formula in the spirit of his allegorical language that is tantamount here to a misinterpretation.¹¹ We meet another example of pictorial disparity in the first chorus from the cantata *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten* where the accompanying bass line depicts collapse and rapid ruin while the voices sing “He has not built on sand.”¹² Here again Bach has instinctively chosen the most striking image that appeared to him and, as it were, dominated his imagination as soon as the word to which it was bound had shone forth from the text. In fact, he only commits such errors of interpretation if the words offer him images we might call unavoidable—insofar as they are familiar to him. He does not “assume their meaning clumsily,” as Lecerf de la Viéville says when pointing out similar errors, except when presented with “words prominent in all languages, and for which composers have a common regard.”¹³ Bach’s weakness, therefore, may be attributed to by his traditional training.

Procedures of his Style

It is again through subconscious habit that Bach gives a displaced descriptive importance to certain words that are transposed into the domain of the abstract and no longer represent anything tangible. We see him do this in the cantata *Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn* where he has the bass descend to low E for translating the words: “What God has ordained, reason cannot indeed *fathom*.”¹⁴ A figure just as unnecessary also refers to the idea of depth in the alto recitative of the secular cantata *Dramma per Musica: Vereinigte Zwietracht der wechselnden Saiten* (Music drama: Discord of changing strings) (1726).¹⁵ In the cantata *Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir* the alto sings of “the lofty wisdom” on high notes¹⁶—a peculiarity, however, that could be justified here by the fact that the key words of the discourse in some way evoke a rising of the notes. But in the Passions the same adjective, “hoch” (high), applied to the high priest (“der hohe Preister”), is almost always delivered on a high note—a procedure not always explained by the declamation’s perspective and one that also seems more likely to be a holdover from its use by earlier composers.

¹⁰ BWV 155/1, mm. 13–15.

¹¹ BWV 11/7c, mm. 1–3.

¹² BWV 93/1, mm. 61–69.

¹³ Lecerf de la Viéville, *Comparaison de la Musique*, pt. 3:70.

¹⁴ BWV 152/5, mm. 10–12.

¹⁵ BWV 207/8, mm. 1–2.

¹⁶ BWV 130/2, mm. 1–12.

Mattheson condemns composers who are too faithful to these false correspondences: "But we make a grotesque imitation out of the music if we let the melodic line reflect the words low, high, earth, jest, sorrow, joy, falling, climbing, tears, and a thousand others like them without ever considering whether reason approves the melismas and particular figures we choose. I do not see why anyone would prefer an illustration of height in response to the words 'Do not aspire to lofty things.' 'Lose heaven, and gain the earth' is a proposition that should be understood figuratively, not literally, and neither a raising nor a lowering of notes is necessary The prayer 'keep me from falling into sin' need not be expressed with a descending vocal line, etc."¹⁷

But we cannot deny it—Bach sometimes appears to yield to this shortcoming. It seems that certain words live an independent, objective life in his imagination and appear in his works as *dramatis personae* who are always recognizable.¹⁸ He sees them dressed in costumes that never change, and their faces remain the same—except in the scenes where he does not want them to be detected, and they succumb, so to speak, to being divested of their physiognomies. His actors keep the masks of their parts until the end, and he allows their characters to develop without being affected by changes in the action. But it would be wrong to attribute this obstinacy about verbal motifs to a misunderstanding of the texts or to the neglect of a composer in too much of a hurry. We would fail to recognize Bach's perceptiveness and the great ingenuity with which he creates his renderings. Ultimately, these conflicting details are lost within the whole and are rectified by the rest of the composition as the context absorbs or modifies them. Quite often, far from being disturbed, the musical commentary benefits from a diversity that, on first glance, we might deem indiscriminate. This mixing of impressions does not lack in realism: it embodies the disorderliness of feelings. And the incongruous expressions do not necessarily destroy the meaning of the phrase; they are more likely to enhance it through their clashing antitheses. Moreover, in many cases, these contradictions have none of the silly coarseness of Mattheson's examples. Much to the contrary, they reveal a profound and delicate psychology. I do not question Mattheson's ruthlessness in criticizing the brilliant melismas that Bach joins to the word "Freuden" (joy) in the following passage of the first recitative from the cantata *Mein Gott, wie lang*, "The wine of joy fails" (ex. 7.1). But does not his dwelling on the word "joy" add to the bitterness of its absence—by way of its abundance? And let us look at how this melisma is accompanied: the instrumental bass never ceases murmuring evenly and heavily as if through an opaque mist, while, on the other hand, the upper strings convey the picturesqueness of the idea with a rustling of chords that pour forth in a direction contrary to the bubbling soprano motif.

¹⁷ Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, pt. 2, chap. 11.

¹⁸ In the cantata *Erfreute euch, ihr Herzen*, Bach uses the chromatic motif of sorrow in the phrase "Ye can put to flight grieving, fearing, anxious trepidation, etc." (BWV 66/1, mm. 156–198).

Ex. 7.1. *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange*, BWV 155/1, mm. 13–15.

This example clearly shows us that Bach knows how to maintain the expressive unity of the phrase while safeguarding the individuality of the word that imposes itself on his imagination. In most passages where he seems to sacrifice the idea for the word, we can discern the penetrating meaning and absolve him from any reproach for incoherence. The single example that we have just seen here is enough, moreover, to prove that Bach succeeds in reconciling the most opposing principles in his work, which is at once both meticulous and broad.

Repetition of Words

Another point follows from the last one: it is that if it is impossible to judge Bach without knowing his contemporaries' opinions on and practices of composition, it would be equally dangerous to seek to judge him according to their strictures. Mattheson's just-cited observations apply directly to many 18th-century works in which the mechanism of representing images takes the place of inspiration. But when directed at Bach, the same censures very often miss the point in analogous cases that on first examination we would believe to be much the same. Bach is infinitely more inaccessible to analysis than masters of lesser genius. The intricacies of his musical technique arise entirely from the intricacies of his thinking, and we find in both of them the same detours and remote connections. We cannot make an immediate assessment by merely skimming his work, because it eludes simplistic judgments and transcends ordinary critical methods. Mattheson, whose writings are full of erudition and whose thinking is nonetheless very supple, is seriously mistaken when he tries to submit Bach to the common standard of measurement. In his *Critica musica*, he ridicules an unnamed composer who repeats the subject of a verb several times in isolation and then restates short sentence fragments: "Ich, ich, ich, ich hatte viel Bekümmernis, ich hatte viel Bekümmernis, in meinem Herzen, in meinem Herzen" ("I, I, I, I had much grief, I

had much grief, in my heart, in my heart").¹⁹ These are the first words of a cantata whose poetry is by Saloman Franck (1659–1725), and the composer Mattheson refers to is Bach—who undoubtedly wrote the work in 1714 in the month following his nomination to the post of “concertmaster” of the Weimar court.²⁰ Obviously, without the music this repetition of words is somehow offensive, but when they are sung it is quite otherwise. Three consonant chords separated by quarter-note rests give the personal pronoun a strange power of expression. A long series of afflictions already burdens this “I,” which the voices sing first in somber accord and then allow to sound out with increasing stress up to a final chord that remains in suspense before the fugal theme begins to unfurl in slowly hammered notes. We could say that all the sadness the choir must proclaim is concentrated in these first three disheartening chords. The voices have barely stated anything yet, but pain has spoken through these profound and isolated chords, and the single word we have heard is enough to forewarn us, through fellow feeling, that this pain is personal to each one of us (ex. 7.2).

Ich, ich, ich, ich hat-te viel Be-küm-mer-niss, ich hat-te viel
I, I, I, I had much grief, I had much

Ich hat-te viel Beküm-mer-niss
I had much grief

cont. Ten.

Ich, ich, ich
I, I, I

Ex. 7.2. *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/2, mm. 1–3.

In the cantata *Schau, lieber Gott*, the same word is repeated with somewhat of an emphasis: “Fear not, I—I am with you” (ex. 7.3).

¹⁹ Mattheson, *Critica musica*, 2: 368.

²⁰ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:525.



Ex. 7.3. *Schau, lieber Gott, wie meine Feind*, BWV 153/3, mm. 9–12.

Here again, Bach could have incurred Mattheson's reprimand. However, this repetition, like the preceding one, perfectly agrees with the lyrical declamation. In his *Ephorus* (1727), Mattheson himself approves of repeating words in the vocal part: "To those who cannot bear the over-frequent repetition of some of the words in arias, we gladly grant that too many repetitions tire the listener; but, if there are too few, he will not be moved. An emphatic word, an energetic feeling, cannot engrave itself more powerfully upon the soul than through a penetrating repetition. Holy scripture, which we must recognize incontestably as supreme judge in such discussions gives enough examples of this in psalms 148 and 150, and especially in 136."²¹ So, in principle, Mattheson accepts the repetition of important words; but in Bach's passages that he has criticized so directly, he has not understood—or has not wished to understand—how much dramatic intensity there is in the gasping repetition of the word "I," from which the anguish of each individual moan breaks out in the concerted wailing.

Long before Mattheson the theologian Mithobius declared, in his *Psalmodia Christiana* (1665), that "experience confirms that the frequent repetition of words—such as is the practice in motets and choruses—profoundly implants God's word in men's hearts with all the more joy and power."²² And Lecerf de la Viéville also recognized the force of repeated words without actually countenancing their use. In fact, speaking of Italian composers, he says "A fault that shows that they overdo expression—and that they intend to overdo it—is their repetitiveness. To make a word felt, they repeat it for a quarter of an hour. The secret is wonderful and spiritual."²³

In Bach's earliest works we already see important words brought to light in this way. For instance, the first chorus from the cantata *Gott ist mein König* (1708) begins with chords on which the word "Gott" (God) builds itself up, as if Bach wished to keep the listener's attention entirely on this radiant word: "God, God, God is my king, God, God, God is, God is my king."²⁴ Likewise, in the phrase "thou art the God who helps me," in the second chorus of the cantata *Nach dir, Herr, verlangst mich*, he emphasizes "the God" by suddenly uniting the four

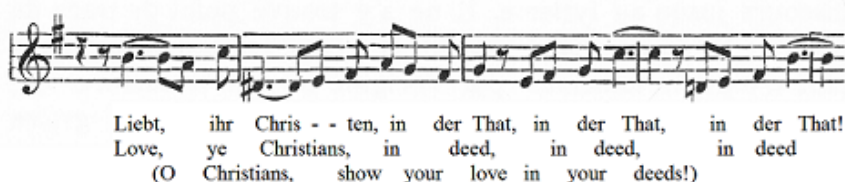
²¹ Mattheson, *Der neue Göttingische*, 103.

²² Hector Mithobius, *Psalmodia Christiana* (Jena: 1665), 261.

²³ Lecerf de la Viéville, *Comparaison de la Musique*, part 3:130.

²⁴ BWV 71/1, mm. 1–7.

voice parts and repeating the words several times.²⁵ Using the same device, he stresses the words “He is not here, not here” in the tenor aria from the Easter cantata *Denn du wirst meine Seele*;²⁶ and in the Easter cantata of 1713 or 1714, *Ich weiss, dass mein Erlöser lebt*, he expresses impatient longing to leave the earth with the impassioned singing of “How soon, soon, soon, I shall be near Jesus.”²⁷ At the beginning of this same cantata, the Christian’s certainty is affirmed by repetition in the phrase “I know, I know, I know that my redeemer lives.”²⁸ So Bach frequently proclaims the idea to us that must, in his opinion, dominate the text he is rendering, and these highlightings in the musical commentary very often inform us of profound reasons for his particular interpretation and reveal with exactitude his soul’s preferences and the order of his thoughts. In this last example, the obstinate restating of the words of conviction gives them the value of a solemn act of faith. Furthermore, he uses the same means in cantata BWV 160 to emphasize Jesus’s words “It is good for you that I depart,”²⁹ and in the cantata *Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes*, the alto similarly stresses the advice given to Christians to show their love “in deed(s)” (ex. 7.4).



Ex. 7.4. *Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes*, BWV 76/12, mm. 16–20.

Repetition of Motifs

In these last examples, insistence is not only manifested through the repetition of words but also through the repetition of the motif. Bach already adopted this procedure in his earliest works, and its effect is remarkable in the cantatas *Aus der Tiefen* (ex. 7.5a) and *Gottes Zeit* (ex. 7.5b), in which some passages that are more recited than sung are doubled—giving their declamation a singular power of emotion and majesty. Moreover, in both cases the words are of great importance

²⁵ BWV 150/4, mm. 13–16.

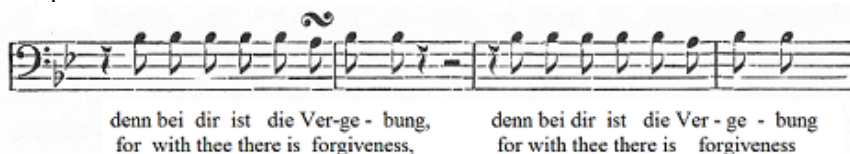
²⁶ BWV 15/4, mm. 29–35. [This cantata was composed by Johann Ludwig Bach according to Unger, *Handbook*, 51.—Trans.]

²⁷ BWV 160/5, mm. 17–19. [This cantata was composed by Georg Philipp Telemann. Unger, *Handbook*, 533.—Trans.]

²⁸ BWV 160/1, mm. 29–39 and 90–96.

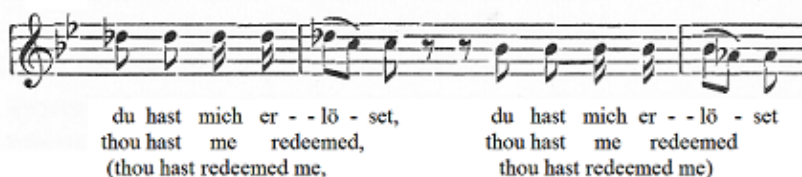
²⁹ BWV 108/1, mm. 11–14.

from the Christian's point of view, since they involve the doctrine of pardon and redemption.



denn bei dir ist die Ver-ge - bung, denn bei dir ist die Ver - ge - bung
for with thee there is forgiveness, for with thee there is forgiveness

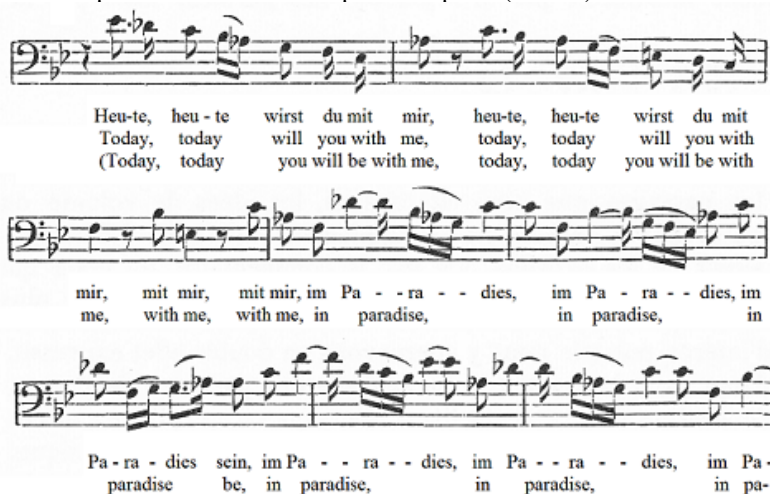
Ex. 7.5a. *Aus der Tiefen, rufe ich Herr, zu dir*, BWV 106/2, mm. 41–44.



du hast mich er - lö - set, du hast mich er - lö - set
thou hast me redeemed, thou hast me redeemed
(thou hast redeemed me, thou hast redeemed me)

Ex. 7.5b. *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*, BWV 106/3a, mm. 10–12.

In the same cantata—*Gottes Zeit*—we have another example of recurring words and motifs, and it is important to consider here the nature of this source of musical development. In the excerpt we will examine next, repetitions of text have an obvious expressive value, while repetitions of the musical line elevate the tone of speech to the level of lyricism. We find no trace of the redundancy that pours out in insignificant repeats in so many Italian works—whether originally Italian or merely written in that idiom. Here all arises from feeling, which reaches all the way from deep tenderness to contemplative rapture (ex. 7.6).



Heu-te, heu - te wirst du mit mir, heu-te, heu-te wirst du mit
Today, today will you with me, today, today will you with
(Today, today you will be with me, today, today you will be with
mir, mit mir, mit mir, im Pa - - ra - - dies, im Pa - ra - - dies, im
me, with me, with me, in paradise, in paradise, in
Pa - ra - dies sein, im Pa - - ra - - dies, im Pa - - ra - - dies, im Pa -
paradise be, in paradise, in paradise, in pa-

ra - - dies, im Pa - ra - - dies sein, heu - te, heu - te wirst du mit
radise, in paradise be, today, today will you with
today you will be with

mir, heu-te, heu-te wirst du mit mir, mit mir, im Pa - ra - dies
me, today, today will you with me, with me, in paradise
me, today, today you will be with me, with me in paradise)

sein, im Pa - ra - dies, im Pa - ra - dies, im Pa - - - -
be, in paradise, in paradise, in paradise

- - - - ra - dies sein
- - - - be


Ex. 7.6. *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*, BWV 106/3a, mm. 25–39.

Insistence

At times, it is the music alone that is insistent. The words are not repeated as in the previous examples, but the verbal sequence unfolds on a melodic line where motifs of a uniform structure pass by without stopping. These obstinate patterns have a profound meaning. Their shape is generally quite simple: often they are formed, we might almost say, from only a single note, to which the voice continually returns after being carried away from it barely one or two scale steps. This peculiarity bonds these vocal formulas with the themes of will, task, and certainty that we have classified in an earlier chapter;³⁰ but in the passages we are examining here, the ideas of will or certainty are not formally enunciated, and Bach expresses them only as commentary on the text that he is provided. However, the interpretation has even more interest for us since we find a doubly expressive effect in it—on one hand, the immediate translation of the words; and on the other, the evocation of a state of soul that, without being explained by the words themselves, will be directly revealed by the music. This complex interpretive activity appears particularly in the soprano aria “Cast, O my heart, cast thyself yet into the loving

³⁰ See ex. 2.1 and preceding text.

arms of the Most High, that he may have mercy on thee” from the cantata *Mein Gott, wie lang*. The beginning of the aria has a rhythm full of momentum; large melodic movements abound and all is broad and passionate. But at the end of the seventh measure of her vocal line, the soprano abruptly passes from major to minor and introduces a new rhythm that obstinately attaches itself to the note that suddenly disrupted the key and is repeated insistently. By darkening the melodic line through this obsession with the altered note, Bach has evidently wanted to give the phrase a tone of supplication, reproducing the pitiful accents and the tenacious moans of a wretched soul’s implorations. But there is something more. This relentlessness in the vocal part brings to mind Jacob’s fervent prayer when he clasps the angel, crying “I will not release you until you have blessed me.” We might even say that the memory of this biblical scene has arisen in Bach’s mind and inspired him. When the text speaks to him of “throwing ourselves into the arms of the Most High to gain his mercy” (ex. 7.7), the energy of his longing revives the struggle with the patriarch: he wants to take hold of God and possess His grace. This Christian, with a soul full of sermons and a mind nourished by mystical readings, reminds us here of the oft-repeated maxim on the subject of heaven: “et violenti rapiunt illud” (and the violent take it by force).

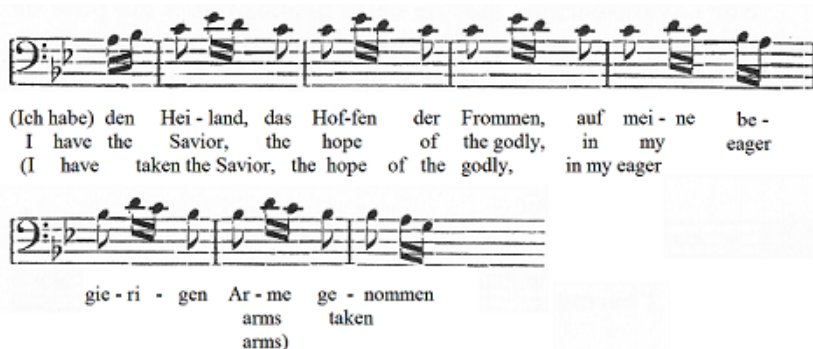


The musical notation is a single staff in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplets indicated by a '3' over the notes. The lyrics are written below the staff in German and English. The German lyrics are: 'in des Höchsten Lie - besar - me, dass er dei - ner sich er - bar - - - me'. The English lyrics are: 'into the Most-High's arms-of-love, that he on thee have mercy (into the loving arms of the Most-High, that he have mercy on thee)'. The melody ends with a repeat sign and a fermata over the final note.

in des Höchsten Lie - besar - me, dass er dei - ner sich er - bar - - - me
 into the Most-High's arms-of-love, that he on thee have mercy
 (into the loving arms of the Most-High, that he have mercy on thee)

Ex. 7.7. *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange*, BWV 155/4, mm. 15–18.

Likewise, in the cantata *Ich habe genug*, when the aged Simeon sings “I have taken the Savior, the hope of the godly, in my eager arms,” Bach restricts the melodic line and gives it a similar insistence. So it would seem that he adds a kind of rugged pride to the joy of the holy man who has finally seen the long-awaited Messiah—a pride from having borne this bare and simple hope, and from having held this divine misery as if it were a feeble child entrusted to his arms—as a symbol and proof of imminent and total possession by Almighty God. As for his hope, Simeon is intoxicated by its very power, and he is in the highest state of rapture. His delirium knows no greater bounds, and his song remains even and taut in steadfast exaltation (ex. 7.8).



(Ich habe) den Hei-land, das Hof-fen der Frommen, auf mei-ne be-
 I have the Savior, the hope of the godly, in my eager
 (I have taken the Savior, the hope of the godly, in my eager

gie-ri-gen Ar-me ge-nommen
 arms taken
 arms)

Ex. 7.8. *Ich habe genug*, BWV 82/1, mm. 66–73.

In the cantata *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*, a motif that seems similar—but is in dissonance with its accompaniment from the very first note—proclaims the obstinacy of the impenitent sinner who brings God’s wrath upon himself. Although the situation is very different, Bach still wants to depict a feeling of doggedness as in the preceding passages, and it is not surprising that he uses the same device in this vocal line (ex. 7.9).



Du a-ber nach dei-nem ver-stock-ten und un-buss-fer-ti-gen
 Thou, however, because of thy obstinate and impatient

Her-zen häu-fest dir selbst den Zorn auf den Tag des Zorns
 heart heapest up for thyself wrath on the day of wrath

Ex. 7.9. *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*, BWV 102/4, mm. 78–89.

This insistence is also manifest in the benediction arias, such as the alto aria “Blessed are ye, ye elect souls” in the cantata *O ewiges Feuer*.³¹

We should note that this expressive resource was also employed before Bach. We find remarkable examples of these persistent motifs in the works of Johann Wolfgang Franck, who sometimes repeats the same note in a melisma that unfolds on a single word, followed by similar melodic groupings between them; sometimes he repeats a musical fragment on different words; and sometimes, to better accentuate the expression of certain passages, he repeats both words and

³¹ BWV 34/3, mm. 9–23.

music. I cite here a phrase from his arrangement for soprano of the chorale *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut* (Lord Jesus Christ, thou highest good).

On the next-to-last word of the clause “Have mercy on me with my great burden,” the melisma maneuvers around the E flat, which thus takes on an odd quality of steadiness that the accompaniment renders even more poignant through its harmonic diversity (ex. 7.10).

Er-barm - - - e - - dich mein in sol - -
Have mercy on me who has such -

- - - cher Last
- a burden

Ex. 7.10. Johann Wolfgang Franck, *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut*, mm 27–32.³²

In the opera *Aeneas* (1680), Franck shows his intent to stress certain words by repeating the same melodic line. He renders more pressing the exhortation to be calm and pretend, which is expressed by the words “Do not complain that she has wounded your heart; conceal your feeling, and act as if you wish to flee,” etc. The advice is given in an insinuating but obstinate manner—rather gently at first, then with a little more vivacity the third time—and the phrase culminates with a sudden cadence, sung twice, duplicating both words and music (ex. 7.11).

so kla - ge nicht zur Stun - de, dass sie dein Herz ver - vun - det, ver -
so do not complain at this hour, that she thy heart wounded,

stel - - - le, ver - stel - le dei - ne brust, ver - stel - le dei - ne brust
conceal, conceal thy feeling, conceal thy feeling

Ex. 7.11. Johann Franck, *Aeneas Ankunft in Italien*, aria 11, mm. 6–10.

³² Motets in the manuscript collection of the Wolfenbüttel library (294, No. IX).

Progression

The expressive intensity of these motivic repetitions increases again when the music progressively rises, as in portraying the growing exaltation of feeling interpreted by a climbing vocal line. It is a fact of experience that the pitch of speech rises more and more in proportion to the passion behind it, and J. F. Reichardt reports that Bach had the habit of observing gradations in pitch in a beggar's increasingly exasperated plea when made to wait for alms that Bach had encouraged him to hope for. In such anecdotes there is nearly always a grain of truth, but fabricating a story out of it often exaggerates or falsifies it completely. Reichardt published this tale in 1796 (*Musikalischer Almanach*, Berlin)³³ when Bach had been dead for forty-six years; so it was easy to surround him with legends, without fear of being accused of error, when witnesses of his life had already reached an age at which people like to give an illusory accuracy to their recollections of youth to better imagine it coming to life again. Had Reichardt been aware of this detail of Bach's personal life for a long time? I do not know, but I should note that in a work published five years earlier Reichardt cites a passage by Quintilian that wonderfully supports this little tale, and he did not make use of it then. In this work entitled *Geist des musikalischen Kunstmagazins* (Berlin, 1791),³⁴ he quotes Quintilian, as saying that "the voice is the herald of the soul" and that "if the passion mounts, the voice rises; if the passion subsides, the voice lowers." At its heart, Reichardt's account of Bach and the beggar contains nothing more than this, even though he also claims in it that, after having gotten the beggar to plead more and more loudly, Bach appeased him little by little by giving him very meager coins at first, and then put an end to the jeremiad with an unusual largess, which, to Bach's great delight, led to a resolution resembling a perfect cadence.³⁵

I cite this tale only with the greatest mistrust; however, it is always possible that Bach had remarked to his pupils that the degree of desire, even in everyday speech, reveals itself through some version of rising modulation. Certainly, his precursors had already observed this long before him. One instance of such an increase is shown by the soprano's gradual soaring in the invocation "miserere nobis" from the last "Agnus Dei" in Orlando di Lasso's mass *Douce Mémoire* (Pleasant remembrance); and, in his motet *Domine, convertere* (Lord, transform), Lasso develops the melody of the "salvum me fac" (save me) through an identical procedure.³⁶ For Schütz, a progressive rising of the melody is both a lyrical resource and an expressive one. Among numerous examples, it suffices to mention here the particular motifs that he combines with the words "His praise

³³ Cited by Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:746.

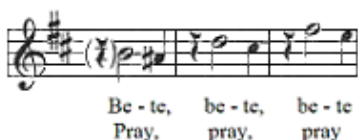
³⁴ Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Geist des musikalischen Kunstmagazins* (Berlin: 1791), 176–77.

³⁵ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:746.

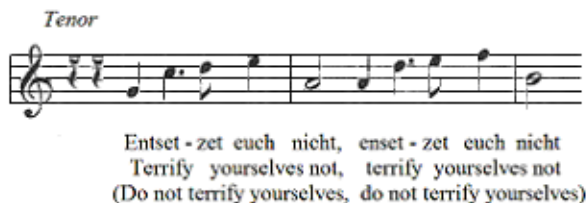
³⁶ The editions by Charles Bordes have spread these works widely.

must always be on my lips” in the short sacred chorus *Ich will den Herren loben allezeit* (I will praise the Lord at all times)³⁷ and those that are repeated exultantly in the duet “*Erhöre mich*” (Hear me)³⁸ when joined to the prayer “Hear me, hear me.”

Whether or not Bach had actually performed the act described in Reichardt’s tale, it remains no less certain that in his works he followed his forerunners by using this form of expression, which gives so much power to a declamation. In the soprano aria of the cantata *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*, the exhortation to pray rises, degree by degree, like prayer itself (ex. 7.12a); and in the tenor aria from the cantata *Denn du wirst meine Seele nicht in der Hölle lassen*, consoling words are also repeated a step higher on the same vocal motif (ex. 7.12b).



Ex. 7.12a. *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*, BWV 115/4, mm. 14–16.

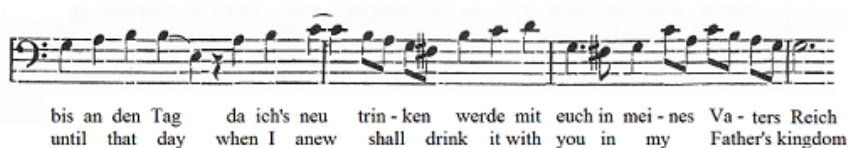


Ex. 7.12b. *Denn du wirst meine Seele nicht in der Hölle lassen*, BWV 15/4, mm. 6–8.

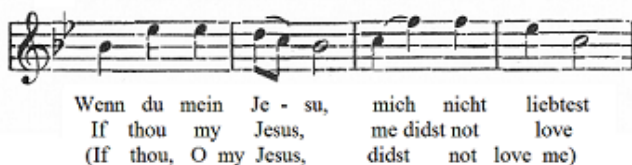
At times, the progression of the vocal line shows a growing feeling without repeating the words. We find this happens at the end of the recitative in the *St. Matthew Passion* where Jesus institutes the Holy Supper and invokes the day he will be reunited with his apostles in his Father’s kingdom (ex. 7.13a). And while the repetitions of the motif in this speech are majestically rapturous, other, less ample repetitions also lend a penetrating tenderness to the melodic line joined to these words mingled with love and anguish: “If thou, O my Jesus, didst not love me, then I would suffer more greatly than from the pain of hell” (ex. 7.13b).

³⁷ Heinrich Schütz, *Kleine geistliche Konzerte*, ed. Spitta, *Sämmtliche Werke* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1885–1927), vol. 6, pt. 2, no. 1.

³⁸ Schütz, *Kleine geistliche Konzerte*, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 6, pt. 1, no. 8.



Ex. 7.13a. *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244/I/17, mm. 36–40.



Ex. 7.13b. *Selig ist der Mann*, BWV 57/3, mm. 109–112.

* * *

Important Words

By merely shortening musical phrases, Bach can emphasize words he deems important; this serves him as a way to separate these words from others in the text so that they burst forth with greater energy. He readily uses this declamatory device to invigorate the injunctions expressed by the choir. Thus, at the beginning of the first chorus from the cantata *Sehet, welch eine Liebe hat uns der Vater erzeiget* the four voices enunciate, in two large chords, the word “*sehet*” (behold), after which the sopranos alone continue the pictorial theme that the other parts will successively state, following the usual contrapuntal procedure.³⁹ “Behold” is also expressed this same way in the first chorus from the *St. Matthew Passion*;⁴⁰ furthermore, it is through these sudden interjections from the chorus and these dialogues between groups of voices that the opening of this Passion takes such a powerfully dramatic turn. The calls and the questionings intersect each other, as in a crowd’s uproar at a game where something very dear to them is at stake. In the bass aria “Hasten, troubled souls” from the earlier *St. John Passion*, the people’s outcries are also heard. By repeatedly asking “*Wohin?*” (where?), they pave the way for the bass’s response—“*nach Golgatha*” (to Golgotha).⁴¹

In scenes from this Passion, such sudden harmonic jolts give an extraordinarily tragic impulse to the expression of the words, and Bach sometimes uses the same means to show contrasts of ideas or feelings in other choruses, thus

³⁹ BWV 64/1, mm. 1–13.

⁴⁰ BWV 244/1, mm. 26–29 et seq.

⁴¹ BWV 245/24, mm. 48–64.

rousing our attention so that we can better perceive the antitheses through the music. When, in the first chorus in the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, the voices have finished the first clause—"I had much grief in my heart"—the choir instantly prepares for "thy consolations revive my soul" with a "but" ("aber"), vigorously sung by all four voice parts on a dominant seventh chord that makes us long for a continuation and astonishes with a lengthy strangeness that only leaves us in suspense, curious to know what this sudden warning holds in store.⁴² In the first chorus from the cantata *Es ist dir gesagt, Mensch, was gut ist* (It has been told you, O Man, what good is), the voices accentuate the same word, "nämlich" (namely), before explaining, in the second part of the chorus's text, "what is good and what the Lord demands of you, *namely*: hold to God's word, practice love, and be humble before your God."⁴³

In recitatives and arias, Bach similarly isolates words that forestall a transformation of the idea that is about to be stated—as in imperative or explanatory expressions. For instance, the adverb "doch" (yet) is frequently articulated on a note that is followed by a silence. Examples include the bass recitative in the cantata *Wo soll ich fliehen hin*,⁴⁴ the soprano recitative in the cantata *Meine Seufzer*,⁴⁵ and the alto aria in the cantata *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin*.⁴⁶ There is no need to multiply examples of this declamatory peculiarity, however, I could cite an infinite number of them.⁴⁷ The same hiatus can be found after the word "allein" (yet), for which I point to the soprano recitative in the cantata *Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim?*⁴⁸ and the alto recitative in the cantata *Ich elender Mensch*.⁴⁹ Bach similarly inserts a silence after the word "siehe" (behold), at the beginning of the cantata *Siehe, ich will viel Fischer aussenden*.⁵⁰

This manner of emphasizing certain words is traditional in German recitative. In his treatise on music, Daniel Speer observes that pauses serve to adorn a composition: "For, when coming upon words that convey something that elicits reflection or is new or astonishing—or even when monosyllables appear such as "ah," "oh," "come," "peace," "look," etc.—listeners feel a definite emotion, and their attention is heightened when these words are followed by a

⁴² BWV 21/1, mm. 35–39.

⁴³ BWV 45/1, mm. 94–116. Nicolaus Niedt uses an analogous means in his composition on the same words in his previously cited collection *Musicalische Sonn- und Fest-Tags-Lust* (Sondershausen: 1698).

⁴⁴ BWV 5/2, mm. 4–6.

⁴⁵ BWV 13/4, mm. 9–11.

⁴⁶ BWV 125/2, mm. 62–68.

⁴⁷ See also the alto recitative from the cantata *Widerstehe doch der Sünde* (BWV 54/2, mm. 1–5).

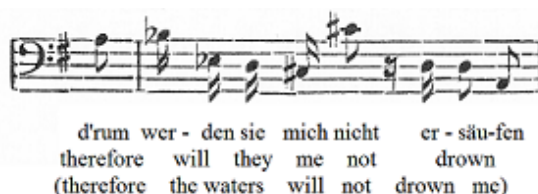
⁴⁸ BWV 89/4, mm. 5–8.

⁴⁹ BWV 48/2, mm. 8–10.

⁵⁰ BWV 88/1, mm. 19–21.

pause.”⁵¹ Johann Kuhnau, Bach’s predecessor at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, applies this rule in his cantatas—for example, in the recitative from his cantata for solo bass *Erschrickt mein Herz vor dir* (My heart is terrified before you) on the word “allein” (alone) and in the cantata for the Feast of the Ascension of 1714 on the word “jedoch” (however).⁵²

With this same means, Bach stresses the first words of the phrase “thy gold . . . is a transient possession” by separating the subject from the verb.⁵³ In the recitative with chorale in the following passage from the cantata *Ich hab in Gottes Herz und Sinn* (I have surrendered to God’s heart and mind) he interrupts the regular course of the clause to bear down on the most forceful word (ex. 7.14a), and in the tenor recitative from the cantata *Ich lasse dich nicht*, a brief silence isolates the last words—on which Bach wants the voice to lean: “Thy blessing remain . . . with me” (ex. 7.14b).



Ex. 7.14a. *Ich hab in Gottes Herz und Sinn*, BWV 92/2, mm. 19–20.



Ex. 7.14b. *Ich lasse dich nicht*, BWV 157/3, mm. 12–13.

At the end of the first chorus in the cantata *Wer sich selbst erhöhet, der soll erniedriget werden* Bach divides the text as if to emphasize each word with the deliberate stress of a popular orator by halting the voices after the word “und” (and), which links the first clause to the words “whoever humbles himself, he shall be exalted”⁵⁴—an interruption in the discourse that compares, perhaps, to the one

⁵¹ Speer, *Grundrichtiger, kurz-, und nöthiger, jetzt wolvermehrter Unterricht der musikalischen Kunst* (Ulm: 1697), 283.

⁵² City of Leipzig library, nos. 117 and 119.

⁵³ BWV 64/3, mm. 7–9.

⁵⁴ BWV 47/1, mm. 209–213.

we examined earlier in the first chorus from the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*. In both cases, the same intention to mark the opposition between the two parts of the sentence is apparent.

Expressive Role of the Vocal Lines

It is even more interesting to observe that sometimes the musical phrase itself remains suspended. In fact, in many cases the voice never concludes in the normal manner on the tonic, and the melodic line does not end as usual with repose, but with something uncertain and incomplete that disturbs its conclusion. A chorus in the funeral cantata *Actus tragicus* ends in this indefinite way: the voices accompanying the soprano's lyrical recitative are suddenly silenced after having unceasingly predicted man's unavoidable death. The last chord they form is not consonant, and the soloist continues her entreaties to Jesus, which are mingled with unsettled chords in the violas da gamba; she ends her last phrase on the third of the key, after the orchestral bass has stopped murmuring the fundamental, so that the mystery of the waning soul has an even more elusive character. Nothing else remains after the voice expires, leaving this pale harmony to fade away in a great, deliberately extended silence.⁵⁵ At the end of the first chorus in the cantata *Herr, wie du willst* the four voice parts end on a dissonance—as if expressing man's powerlessness to resolve his uncertainty in the face of God's will.⁵⁶

Often Bach lets the voice and orchestra sustain a dissonant chord in the middle of an aria, as if by arresting the logical progression of the vocal line he seeks to invite the listener into formless and limitless reverie. He does this on the words "in peace" in the tenor aria from the cantata *Jesus nahm zu sich die Zwölfe*.⁵⁷ In the tenor aria from the cantata *Schau, lieber Gott* the vocal line likewise stops on the word "Ruhr" (rest), and the held note ends on a diminished seventh chord whose length is extended by a fermata.⁵⁸ Also, the tenor recitative from the cantata *Ich glaube, lieber Herr* culminates in a vocal line whose last note is at intervals of a seventh from the note played by the bass and at a fourth from the expected tonic (ex. 7.15).

⁵⁵ Cantata *Gottes Zeit* (BWV 106/2d, mm. 50–55).

⁵⁶ BWV 73/1, mm. 71–73.

⁵⁷ BWV 22/4, mm. 52–64.

⁵⁸ BWV 153/6, mm. 22–24.

Tenor *Adagio*

forte

Ach Herr! wie lan - - - - - ge?
 Ah Lord! how long - - - - - -?

Ex. 7.15. *Ich glaube, lieber Herr*, BWV 109/2, mm. 15–17.

In some arias that end with a question, the voice does not conclude on the tonic of the key. This irregularity can be heard in the second soprano aria of the cantata *Selig ist der Mann*⁵⁹ and in the bass arioso of the cantata *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*.⁶⁰

In these last arias, Bach applies a general rule followed by composers who wished to imitate the inflections of ordinary speech when the voice naturally rises at the end of a question.⁶¹ In his *Gradus ad Parnassum*, J. J. Fux specifies various musical formulas for interrogation.⁶² Several years later, in *Kern melodischer Wissenschaft* (1737), Mattheson observes that “in fact, in everyday speech the voice always rises with a question, but in melody there are many circumstances that not only permit exceptions on this point but often demand them.” He adds that we must be wary of apparent interrogatives and only employ the interrogative form in the vocal line if the text truly expresses questioning.⁶³

We only need to examine a few examples to show that Bach is faithful to the custom. In the soprano recitative of the cantata *Aus tiefer Not* an admirable interrogative formula is displayed when joined to the words “What? Knowest thou not thy helper?” (ex. 7.16a). We can compare it with this reproach in the *Christmas Oratorio*: “What should frighten me about the horror of death?” (ex. 7.16b).

Wie? Kennst du deinen Hel-fer nicht?
 What? Knowest thou not thy helper?

Ex. 7.16a. *Aus tiefer Not*, BWV 38/4, mm. 7–9.

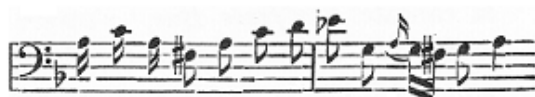
⁵⁹ BWV 57/7, mm. 220–230.

⁶⁰ BWV 102/4, mm. 132–147.

⁶¹ See Jules Combarieu, *Les Rapports de la Musique et de la Poésie* (Paris: 1893), 38.

⁶² Johann Joseph Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, German trans. Mizler (Leipzig: 1742), 195.

⁶³ Johannes Mattheson, *Kern melodischer Wissenschaft* (Hamburg: 1737), 89. See also Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 181, 192.



Was jag-te mir zu-letzt der Tod für Grauen ein?
 What frightens me least is death for horror?
 (What should frighten me about the horror of death?)

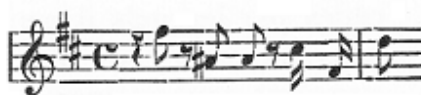
Ex. 7.16b. *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/38, mm. 22–23.

We should note again the beginning of the bass recitative “Why is it that ye sought me?” from the cantata *Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen* (ex. 7.17a). Momus’s question “What, Midas, are you mad?” also takes an ascending form in the *Dramma per Musica* whose subject is the dispute between Phoebus and Pan (ex. 7.17b).



Was ist's? was ist's, dass ihr mich ge - su-chet?
 Why is it? why is it, that ye me sought?
 (Why is it that ye sought me?)

Ex. 7.17a. *Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen*, BWV 32/2, mm. 1–2.



Wie, My-das, bist du toll?
 What, Midas, are you mad?

Ex. 7.17b. *Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan*, BWV 201/12, mm. 1–2.

To give more power to an interrogation we have seen that Bach is not afraid to break with the usually respected custom of ending the melodic line on the tonic and that he goes as far as ending a recitative on a dissonance. Likewise, he just as readily defies the old rule that ordains beginning every composition with a consonance⁶⁴—even when what the words express suggests it to him. We find the most remarkable example of such daring at the very beginning of the cantata *Widerstehe doch der Sünde*: “Resist indeed sin.”⁶⁵ And in the tenor aria from the cantata *Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes* the vocal line includes the interval of

⁶⁴ See my work *Descartes et la Musique* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1907).

⁶⁵ BWV 54/1, mm. 11–12.

an augmented fourth on the word “hate” (“Hasse”) at the beginning of the phrase “Hate, then, hate me thoroughly, hostile generation!”⁶⁶

In the final recitative of the cantata *Ich habe meine Zuversicht*, the strings precede the vocal line with a tremolo on a dominant-seventh chord.⁶⁷ The bass recitative in the cantata *Ein feste Burg* also opens with a dissonance before the words “Ponder indeed, O child of God, this love so great,”⁶⁸ and here the dissonance serves to give more solemnity to the beginning of the recitative by summoning us to a more energetic attention. Also, in the third verse of the motet *Jesu, meine Freude* (Jesu, priceless treasure), the five voices begin the phrase “defiance to the ancient serpent” on a forceful seventh chord.⁶⁹

These are the principal resources of Bach’s musical speech considered from the point of view of phrase formation. But before abandoning our study of these elements of his inventiveness, we must still examine one of the procedures through which he reveals his desire to make the ideas shine forth that seem principal to him in a text; so we will expressly point out the words that prompt his use of this particular procedure. I am speaking of melismas, whose role in 17th- and 18th-century music is very important. Misled by the abuses of Italian virtuosity, we are accustomed to regard melismas only as empty and outdated ornaments to the melodic line. But if we return to the very origin of deeply meaningful music we see that the melismas of the first masters of recitative are both supple and lyrical. They were used especially to describe external actions, and also to represent, by analogy, movements of the soul. We have already examined a large number of melismas in the examples quoted in the account of Bach’s vocabulary, and it is hardly necessary to provide new ones here. To have Bach’s principal types of melismas in mind one need only skim through the preceding chapters to review the themes of doubt,⁷⁰ haste,⁷¹ and especially the themes of force⁷² and joy.⁷³ But we want to observe how he uses these great words of the musical language because we cannot conceive of treating indifferently these broad arabesques that compel us to listen as they adorn the words with a radiance of notes. In his *Critica Musica*, Johann Mattheson writes, with good reason, that if “the repetition of an insignificant word is foolish, it is even more nonsensical to add a melisma to such a word.”⁷⁴ Sometimes, we must acknowledge that composers allow themselves to be carried away in placing the melismas almost at random. They only take into account the beautiful sonority of certain vowels on

⁶⁶ BWV 76/10, mm. 10–13.

⁶⁷ BWV 188/5, mm. 1–2.

⁶⁸ BWV 80/3, mm. 1–2.

⁶⁹ BWV 227/3/3, mm. 1–4.

⁷⁰ Ex. 2.20 and preceding text.

⁷¹ Exs. 3.28a–g and preceding text.

⁷² Ex. 3.33 and preceding text.

⁷³ Exs. 3.22a, b; 3.35a–d; 3.36a–g.

⁷⁴ Johannes Mattheson, *Critica musica* (Hamburg: 1725), 2: 376.

which a singer's virtuosity can gracefully display itself; and at the end of an aria they unfurl their flourishes like a professional letter-writer's swirling initials at the bottom of a page. Bach has not entirely escaped these practices of his day, and he recognizes very well, with Printz and the majority of composers, that "the vowels 'a, e, o,' and the diphthongs begun by these vowels, allow a wonderful coloring."⁷⁵ However, we should note that in an infinite number of cases the suppleness of Bach's imagination saves him, and even where a breach appears, his ingeniousness in applying the inflection redeems him. He does not know how to transgress as mediocre composers do.

Moreover, many melismas can unfold on the favorable vowels without sacrificing any expression in the words or order in the discourse. The examples I have already provided attest to this. Who would not recognize the rightness of style—their monotonous and ponderous melancholy—of the melismas on the word "Sorgen" (cares)? The vowel "o," on which the notes float or spin themselves out certainly facilitates their somber expansiveness, but that vowel surely would not have elicited them if the meaning of the word and its place in the sentence had not allowed Bach to offer an image through the singing—as opposed to a mere exercise for the singer (exs. 7.18a, b):



Ex. 7.18a. *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*, BWV 3/5, mm. 9–11.



Ex. 7.18b. *In allen meinen Taten*, BWV 97/8, mm. 43–49.

In the second of these two melismas in particular, Bach's expressive intention is admirably revealed by the rhythmic disturbance of the motif and by the

⁷⁵ Printz, *Phrynidis Myrtilenaei . . . erster Theil*, 114.

uniformity of the pattern, which darkens by modulating into the minor and ends wearily. This example reveals even better Bach's intention to seek an effect of feeling here: his interpretation of the verb "sorgen" (cares) is exaggerated—all things considered—since the text simply says "To die or to live, whenever he bids me. Whether it be today or tomorrow, *I let him care about that*; He knows the proper time."

On the other hand, there is something slightly routine in the constancy with which Bach almost always decorates the words "alles" and "alle" (all) with a melisma. Certainly the "a" resounds magnificently in them, and there is a kind of fullness in the very meaning of the word to which redundancy is never unbecoming. Heinrich Schütz had already delighted in unfurling long lines on the first syllable of this adjective;⁷⁶ but Mattheson questions the usefulness of extensive sequences of notes on "alles."⁷⁷ Although Bach often employs such sequences without sufficient reason, he nonetheless knows how to produce, through the very excess of melismas joined to the word "alles," extraordinary effects of tumultuous plenitude. The enormous scrolls traced by the voices in the first chorus from the cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen* are not only wide-ranging scales on the vowel "a," they also correspond to the arpeggios and swirling patterns in the orchestra and enhance the stormy coloring at the beginning of the cantata.⁷⁸ In the aria that ends the first part of the cantata *Geist und Seele wird verwirret* we also find extended melismas on "Alles,"⁷⁹ just as we do in the tenor aria from the cantata *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*.⁸⁰ In these two examples, the value of the great tirades is purely ornamental, just as they are in a number of other cases that we do not have space to consider here.

As for the descriptive melisma, we have already dealt with it earlier as I have said; so I will only point out here melismas on the word "Flammen" (flames), where Bach not only uses to advantage the broad sonority of the vowel "a" but also attempts to describe the flame's agile biting and crackling. These passages are taken from the tenor aria in the cantata *O Ewigkeit*, (7.19a) and the bass aria in the cantata *Ach, ich sehe* (7.19b).

⁷⁶ See, for example, the little sacred chorus *Ich will den Herren loben allezeit* (Schütz, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 6, pt. 2, no. 1).

⁷⁷ Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 203.

⁷⁸ BWV 72/1, mm. 17–22 et seq.

⁷⁹ BWV 35/4, mm. 8–16, 54–56, 57–63.

⁸⁰ BWV 12/6, mm. 25–28.



Ex. 7.19a. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! I*, BWV 20/3, mm. 44–46.



Ex. 7.19b. *Ach! ich sehe, itzt, da ich zur Hochzeit gehe*, BWV 162/1, mm. 27–29.

Among the lyrical melismas, I can cite again those in the soprano aria “Alleluja!” of the cantata *Jauchzet Gott*⁸¹ and those given to the same word in the tenor and alto arias of the cantata *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir*.⁸²

* * *

Major and Minor Modes

Before passing on to studying the musical forms that Bach employs, we must speak briefly again of the characters he attributes to the major and minor modes, and we must examine the expressive tasks he assigns to the different voices.

To examine the first subject, we need not determine if all Bach’s major-tonality compositions are joyous, or if all those he writes in minor are sad. Such a classification would be almost childish and would produce only mediocre results. In fact, certain very sorrowful choruses or arias are sung in a major key,⁸³ and certain cheerful arias are in a minor mode.⁸⁴ It is only when the major and minor are found directly opposed to each other in the same composition that we can

⁸¹ BWV 51/5, mm. 1–17.

⁸² BWV 29/1, mm. 20–24; /7, mm. 1–4.

⁸³ For example, the alto aria from *Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem* (BWV 159/2).

⁸⁴ Such is the tenor aria “Frohe Hirten” from the *Christmas Oratorio* (BWV 248/15). Notice, however, that in a general way Bach observes the expressive distinction between major and minor, and to render this opposition more apparent we will cite some examples later where the antithesis is strict.

establish with certainty a significant antagonism. We are then in a position to observe what Kircher calls the mutation of the mode, which, according to him, “has a great power of expression” (“magnam emphasim”) and produces in its listeners “notable alterations of feeling.” As evidence of this claim, he transcribes a dialogue in which Giacomo Carissimi—“the very celebrated choir prefect at the German College”—represents, in his own way, the tears of Heraclitus and the laughter of Democritus. Here is the beginning of this “paradigm of metabolic style” (ex. 7.20).

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system shows a treble staff with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a series of rests indicated by dashes. The lyrics are "E pur da ri - - - de - re" and "And yet it makes you laugh - - -". The bass staff has a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The bass line is simpler, with some eighth notes and rests. The second system continues the melody in the treble staff, with lyrics "E pur da And yet it" and "pian makes you cry - - - ge - - re". The bass staff continues with eighth notes and rests. The score is a transcription of a dialogue, with the treble staff representing one voice and the bass staff representing another.

Ex. 7.20. Giacomo Carissimi, in Kircher: *Musurgia universalis*, VII/9, p. 673, mm. 1–11.

In the melisma joined to the word “sorgen” (cares) that I cited several pages earlier, we have seen the melodic line darken in this way, and in the alto aria of the cantata *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*, Bach gives a sudden gravity to the end of this sentence evoking death, the deliverer who brings an emancipation that is paid for with suffering: “No longer dost thou make me afraid, O death; If I can only attain freedom through thee, then I must indeed die one day.” This mixture of boldness and fear has an admirable verity of feeling. Here again, Bach completes his text and makes us imagine what the words do not avow—the inevitable terror of death’s unpredictability, which the promises of consolation are not enough to deflect (ex. 7.21).

wenn ich durch dich die Frei-heit nur er-lan-ge
if I through thee freedom only can attain
(if I can only attain freedom through thee)

es muss ja so einmal ge-stor-ben sein
one must indeed one day die
then I must indeed one day die)

Ex. 7.21. *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*, BWV 114/5, mm. 10–14.

In the duo recitative before the aria “Flösst, mein Heiland” from the *Christmas Oratorio*, a kind of hymn formed upon invocations to Jesus sung by the soprano moves onto a minor chord when the words recall that Jesus sacrificed himself on “the bitter cross.”⁸⁵

This contrast in modality can already be seen in the cantata *Gott ist mein König* (1708) when Bach wants to oppose the state of peace in God’s protected city with the phrase “Though murder and the storm of war arise everywhere else” (ex. 7.22).⁸⁶

Hier muss der Frie-de glän-zen, wenn Mord und Krieses-
Here must peace shine, though murder and storm-of-war
(Here peace must shine, though murder and storm-of-war)

sturm sich al-ler-orts er--liet
everywhere else arise
arise everywhere else)

Ex. 7.22. *Gott ist mein König*, BWV 71/5, mm. 7–10.

Lastly, we see that in the alto aria of the cantata *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*, a modulation into the major vitalizes the vocal line and is prolonged in the

⁸⁵ BWV 248/38, mm. 17–17.

⁸⁶ Schütz: *Sämtliche Werke*, 6:9; Franz Tunder: *Gesangswerke*, ed. Seiffert (1900), 112; and Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, “Vocal and Instrumental Compositions,” *Denkmäler Deutsche Tonkunst* (1905), 11:100 already provide us with some examples of the same nature.

accompaniment by bright chords when, after having reproached the soul for its torpor, the singer cries out “Rouse thyself!”⁸⁷

The Different Voices

Turning now to Bach’s use of the different voices, we must note that he reserves for each of them the role that best suits its nature. G. B. Doni recommends, in his treatise on theatrical music, assigning each player a voice in keeping with its character. According to him it is desirable that Jesus be represented by a tenor “of ordinary tone”—this voice being one that befits a well-built body. God, the Father, “always represented in the form of an old man,” could not be better represented than by a baritone. Angels will have soprano voices, and the prince of demons, who is customarily depicted as “large and bearded,” will sing in a deep bass and will be accompanied by several low instruments of odd sonority. Doni continues his enumeration, having the gods of Olympus follow the angels and demons, and concludes by entrusting the contralto with the task of portraying Bellone, “goddess of war,” while giving the sopranos the mission of playing Ceres, Juno, Venus, Minerva, and leaving to the higher sopranos the roles of Diana and Proserpina.⁸⁸

Bach agrees somewhat with Doni on this principle: that one should first seek the coloring in each voice that attunes with the feeling rendered by the words. But in applying this idea, he contradicts the Italian critic nearly everywhere.⁸⁹ Doni sees the *dramatis personae*, places them on stage, and groups them in scenes where they appear very ready for action with the countenances and attributes that painters have so often reproduced. But Bach never has this theatrical view, and it is souls that he prefers to describe. He does not need to imagine God as an old man with a

⁸⁷ BWV 115/2, mm. 54–60. Bach confines himself to this very modern usage when employing ancient keys expressively. At the beginning of the 18th century, they had fallen almost entirely into disuse. Andreas Werckmeister wrote (p. 55) in his *Harmonologia musica* (1702): “We only wish to deal briefly here with the twelve modes on which our chords and other pieces are still sometimes based: today we would be able to manage well with two modes.” However, several pages further on, he recognizes the necessity of understanding the modes well in order to accompany the old chorales suitably and to create well-adapted preludes from them (p. 59). In his *Musicalischer Trichter* (1706), M. H. Fuhrmann reports that Johann Rosenmüller (1619–1684) allows for only two modes, Ionian and Dorian (major and minor) that, he says, contain all the others (p. 41). Handel wrote to Mattheson from London on February 24, 1719 “But, as we are liberated from the strict limitations of ancient music, I do not see what use the Greek modes can be for modern music.” (Mattheson, *Critica musica*, 2:211).

⁸⁸ Giovanni Battista Doni, *Trattato dell Musica scenica*, complete works (1633–35), 2:86.

⁸⁹ In the *Dramma per Musica: Tönet, ihr Pauken!* (BWV 214), Bellone is a soprano. Diana, however, sings the high part in the cantata *Was mir behagt* (BWV 208). Moreover, it is very probable that Bach did not know this work by Doni. I only cite it to show that the idea of characterizing the different voices was already current.

deep voice, but he does make Him speak with the full strength of the Almighty, in a serious and troubling tone—for example when God asks, in the cantata *Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim?*, “O Ephraim, what shall I make of thee?”⁹⁰ In the cantata *Siehe, ich will viel Fischer aussenden*, Jesus reassures Peter—not in the tenor voice that Doni imagined, but in a bass voice with a large, firm tone.⁹¹ Moreover, Christ sings in this same voice in the *St. Matthew* and *St. John* Passions, and when Bach wants the voice of the Holy Spirit to be heard, he does this again, with the bass singing in a calm sonority—without passion but full of mercy—to declare to us these words of consolation: “Peace be to those who die for the Lord.” The cantata based on the chorale *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*, in which the voice of the Holy Spirit sings, is also very interesting for studying Bach’s expressive use of the different vocal timbres.⁹² In this work, each of the singers plays, as it were, a role. The alto represents “Fear,” the tenor is “Hope,” and the bass is “the Voice of the Holy Spirit.” We will not analyze this cantata, which carries the subtitle *Dialogus* (Dialogue), but I should point out that the same allegorical figures of fear and hope are likewise portrayed by the alto and tenor in the cantata *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen*.⁹³ On the other hand, in the trio from the *Christmas Oratorio*, the alto expresses the tranquil joy of certainty while the tenor and soprano are preyed upon by doubt and desire.⁹⁴ There would seem to be a contradiction between this trio, in which the alto sings of peace, and the other cantatas we have been citing in which the alto speaks of fright; but this is not the case. As Arnold Schering superbly states, “each time a situation reaches the highest point, whether it be in sorrow or calm joy, Bach resorts to the alto voice and achieves some striking effects. It is this voice that utters pleas for mercy with the greatest insistence. Its dark tone expresses human feelings most truthfully, and the most passionate and penetrating arias are written for it.” And Schering refers, with just cause, to the alto arias from the *St. Matthew* and *St. John* Passions, the “Agnus Dei” from the *Mass in B Minor*, and the “Et misericordia” duet with tenor in the *Magnificat*.⁹⁵ We can also note again here the alto arias from the cantatas *Du Friedefürst, Herr Jesu Christ*,⁹⁶ *Komm, du süsse Todestunde*,⁹⁷ *Gott soll allein mein Herze haben*,⁹⁸ and others where the feeling is intimate and penetrating.

On the other hand, Bach makes use of the soprano in spirited and brilliant arias with a bright and entwining lyricism, and it is the soprano he asks to ring out

⁹⁰ BWV 89/1.

⁹¹ BWV 88/4.

⁹² BWV 60/4, mm. 4–9.

⁹³ BWV 66.

⁹⁴ BWV 248/51, mm. 21–61.

⁹⁵ Arnold Schering, *Bach’s Textbehandlung* (Leipzig: 1901), 27.

⁹⁶ BWV 116/2.

⁹⁷ BWV 161/1.

⁹⁸ BWV 169/3 and 5.

the silvery arpeggios in the cantatas *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen*⁹⁹ and *Christum wir sollen loben schon*.¹⁰⁰ All in all, Bach's most popular arias are the soprano arias—for example the “echo aria” in the *Christmas Oratorio*¹⁰¹ and the “Pentecost” aria in the cantata *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt*.¹⁰²

As for the tenor, he possesses something of the generous voice of the violin, whose richness adapts itself to every subject. We should note, however, his special and almost liturgical function as “historian” in the Passions and in other recitatives drawn from the gospel.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ BWV 51/1.

¹⁰⁰ BWV 121/5.

¹⁰¹ BWV 248/39.

¹⁰² BWV 68/2.

¹⁰³ For example, in the cantata *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen* (BWV 11/2, 5, 7a, and 7c), in the *Christmas Oratorio*, etc.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PRINCIPAL COMPOSITIONAL FORMS IN BACH'S VOCAL MUSIC

Recitative. – Arioso. – Aria with several stanzas. – Da capo aria. – Lyric value of this form. – French duets. – Italian duets. – Dialogues. – Individuality of themes in different voices. – Fugue, a lyrical form.

Recitative

Of all compositional forms, the ordinary recitative seems simplest and freest. Very clear and very supple, it is the expressive form par excellence. Nearly unconstrained from the enigmas of compositional craft and barely embellished, it only seeks to move us and occasionally charm us. The word dominates throughout, and its vocal line seems no more than an embroidered declamation. It develops like sparingly modulated speech, and the accentuations of the words dictate the phrasings of the melodic lines that open out through the voice's emotions as its melismas merely unfold like the grand gestures of an exalted actor or the explicit movements of a mime. Nowhere can a composer's sensitivity be better revealed. But it is not a question of architecture, proportions, or strict tonality—as Johann David Heinichen pointed out in his treatise on accompaniment (p. 214) published in Hamburg in 1711: “The recitative is a new and distinct style . . . in which one is neither careful about making regular resolutions, creating a natural progression of notes, nor following a set meter or other standard conventions. In brief, its prose

functions in contrast to an organized musical structure that encloses poetry within certain metrical limits.”¹

We should not believe, however, that recitative language, by not being submissive to generally observed compositional precepts, completely escaped all organization. Far from it. In a book published several years before this one I cited by Heinichen, Barthold Feind took great care to inform us that the recitative is governed by some very detailed laws. He tells us that if “something is asked, narrated, commanded, or read” in the recitative, each one of these distinctions is expressed in the music according to particular rules and by notes or harmonies of a special character. “The semi-colon, the period, the question mark, the exclamation point, the colon, the comma—each has its laws and rhythms that are as different as fire and water. When a singer reads a letter in an opera by an excellent composer such as Reinhard Keiser, we almost perceive a ‘tertium quid’ (a third something) between melodic line and speech, and the same thing can be said of every recitative.”² We have already seen that these rules are less formal than Feind supposes, and we recall, moreover, that they are based on knowledge of natural declamation and tend to reproduce its characteristics. Therefore, the composer truly gifted with an expressive sense can instinctively create them; but it is almost a prerogative of genius, and Mattheson is not wrong to write, in the preface to his oratorio *Der blutrünstige Keltertreter* (1721), that it takes “more artistry and ability to compose a single recitative well, taking into account its feelings and observing its phrase divisions . . . than to compose ten arias according to common practice.”³ Some very rare qualities, Mattheson adds, must, in fact, be combined in a recitative. For him, it is no small matter, as many think, to bring to life a good recitative, and in his *Kern melodischer Wissenschaft* he lists the properties of one that is well constructed.

Here is a translation of this curious statement:

1. The recitative does not want to be forced, but completely natural.
2. One must observe perfectly its expressive energy (*emphasis*).⁴
3. The emotion must not suffer in the least.
4. All of it must reach our ears as easily and as intelligibly as if it were spoken.
5. The recitative insists much more on the divisions of speech than every aria, in which one tolerates some negligence due to the delight of the melodic line.

¹ Heinichen, *Neu erfundene und gründliche Anweisung, wie ein Music-liebender auff gewisse vortheilhaffte Arth könne zu vollkommener Erlernung des General-Basses, entweder durch eigenen Fleiss selbst gelangen oder durch andere kurtz und glücklich dahier angeführet werden, etc.* (Hamburg: 1711).

² Feind, *Deutsche Gedichte* (Stade: 1708), preface:78.

³ Cited in Johann Mattheson's *Der wollkommene Capellmester* (Hamburg: 1739), 23.

⁴ “Nachdruck” in the German text.

6. Strictly speaking, melismas and repetitions do not suit the recitative, except in special cases.
 7. Accentuation must never be forgotten.
 8. Although the tempo itself is often somewhat relaxed, it is fitting, however, to respect it while composing.
 9. The style adopted must be maintained in all its manifestations, and yet it must present something unexpected in the succession of notes.
 10. One must search for the most ingenious variety in the procession of motifs and in modulations but in such a way that they seem produced by chance.
- In short, nothing more surely betrays the composer's awkwardness than a stiffened recitative and one that appears spelled out.⁵ It is a frequently noted result.⁶

Mattheson therefore puts the composer on guard for faults in the recitative but does not teach him how to avoid them. In actuality, a simple ability must suffice for the composer capable of understanding the text upon which he wishes to write. If he possesses this, it will save him as much from monotony as from pallor, and he will not need to concede to his weakness by weaving into the meager woof of his melodic line some facile arabesques whose patterns everyone already knows. But this resource belongs only to inspired artists, and even the most learned teachers would not know how to convey it to them. Mattheson's list of recommendations lacks only one counsel: to have imagination and a great deal of talent.

Therefore, it is exactly through his inventiveness that Bach distinguishes himself in his recitatives. He never has difficulty in developing them with this "ingenious variety" that Mattheson extols. At the same time, he satisfies the first condition of the recitative better than anyone else—that it must be intelligible and expressive. In fact, we are already acquainted with the power of his vocabulary, and several examples will show us this strength in action. We will see the precision and pleasing diversity he uses to combine the components of his language, and the richness of his imagination will appear just as precise and diverse when he seems to be dealing only with materials fully prepared beforehand.

The soprano recitative from the cantata *Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen* demonstrates very clearly the procedure Bach uses for creating an interpretation of the text with music that is as comprehensible and colorful as the text itself. The words are "My trouble increases and robs me of all rest. My cup of woe is completely filled with tears, and this distress, which makes me completely

⁵ Literally: a recitative from the "reading primer."

⁶ Johann Mattheson, *Kern melodischer Wissenschaft* (Hamburg: 1737), 97. Mattheson gives this work as the "precursor" of the more complete treatise entitled *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, which appeared in 1739. The same rules are found there with some variants (pt. 2, chap. 13, § 24).

senseless, is not stilled. Sorrow's night of care pushes down my oppressed heart, therefore I sing only songs of lamentation. Yet, my soul, no, be comforted in your pain: God can transform the wormwood's juice quite easily into the wine of gladness and thereupon grant you many thousand pleasures."

From the first measure—even before the voice has begun—the harmony darkens the accompaniment and announces unsettling sadness and the need for consolation. The opening chord is not consonant, and Bach has laid it out so that the note characterizing its irregularity particularly stands out. Through this configuration he gives this dominant-seventh chord a somber energy that we would never expect from such a typical harmony of a generally milder effect. This opaque held note is extended through the whole measure, and, in the following measure, with a shift in the bass and a hesitant melodic line, the harmony is disturbed further. Whereas the voice expresses sorrow's progression with an ascending motif, the accompaniment passes from the bleak chord it first sounds to a more penetrating one that still seemed to Bach's contemporaries to be endowed with some peculiarity: the diminished-seventh chord. The same jumbled and intense harmony joins the declamation of tearful moans that follows, and we notice in the vocal line here the acute stress of the repeated A-flat on "mein Jammerkrug" (my cup-of-woe) and then the following octave leap with which Bach interprets the idea of fullness through emphasis—a familiar process to him,⁷ and one by which he gives the word "ganz" (completely) a great gush of sorrow here. In the next clause—"and this distress is not stilled"—a diminished-seventh accompanies the word "Noth" (distress) and places it in relief, while the soprano stresses the negative ("nicht") with a rising note that renders the word more distinct in the middle of this phrase whose nearly even delivery portrays great righteousness. The key becomes more disturbing in the next phrase where fallings of the vocal line depict dejection, and the modulation into minor that dominates for three measures gives an impression of persistent and inconsolable sadness. In this way, Bach prepares for a powerfully contrasting effect: when the words announce the turn-around of feeling to a brightening in the soul, these murky hues disappear. The minor chords persist beneath the vigorously articulated words "Yet, my soul, no," but the stately vocal arpeggio illumines the recitative. So, even if some dissonances in the bass line weaken this sudden joy, and even if the "bitter" memory of suffering perpetuates some harshness, these last mists are lifted, yielding to the serenity of the melodic line that radiates with motifs of consolation and happiness (Ex. 8.1).

⁷ See exs. 1.30a–e and preceding text.

Mein Kum-mer nim-met zu, und raubt mir al-le Ruh', mein Jam-mer-krug ist
My trouble increases, and robs me of all rest, my cup-of-woe is

ganz mit Thrä-nen an-ge-fül-let, und die-se Noth wird nicht ge-stil-let so mich ganz
completely with tears filled, and this distress is not stilled, which me completely
(completely filled with tears, and this distress is not stilled, which makes me

un-em-pfind-lich macht. Der sor-gen Kum-mer-nacht drückt mein be-
senseless makes. Sorrow's night-of-care presses my
completely senseless. Sorrow's night-of-care presses my

klemmtes Herz dar-nie-der, drum sing' ich lau-ter Jam-mer-lie-der
oppressed heart down, therefore sing I only songs-of-lamentation
oppressed heart down, therefore I sing only songs of lamentation

Doch, Seele, nein, sei nur getrost in deiner Pein! Gott kann den Wermuthsafft gar leicht in
Yet, soul, no, be just comforted in your pain! God can the wormwood's-juice quite easily
Yet, soul, no, be comforted in your pain! God can transform quite easily

Freudenwein ver-kehren und dir alsdann viel tau-send Lust ge-wäh-ren.
 wine-of-gladness transform and you thereupon many thousand pleasures grant.
 the wine of gladness and thereupon grant you many thousand pleasures.)

6 4 5

Ex. 8.1. *Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen*, BWV 13/4, mm. 1–15.

In the alto recitative from the cantata *Ich elender Mensch* (I, wretched one), we see one of these surprise modulations that Mattheson advises composers to plan with concealed ingenuity. This recitative's opening is essentially a long lamentation on the misery of life in this world, on the ravages created by the "poison of sin," and on the sorrows that the soul must bear until the grave: "But it is the soul that feels the strongest poison, with which it is infected; thus, when suffering strikes the dying body, when the cross's cup tastes bitter to it, then that cup forces from it a passionate sigh" (ex. 8.2).

Al-lein die See-le füh-let das stärk-ste
 (But the soul feels the strongest)

Gift, da-mit sie an-ge-ste-cket
 poison, with which it is infected

6 4 2 6 4 2

Ex. 8.2. *Ich elender Mensch*, BWV 48/2, mm. 8–13.

In this recitative—for which only the figured bass is given—the strings realize the harmonies indicated in the continuo part. But the instrumental accompaniment remains greatly restrained here, and this simplicity makes the bold series of chords stand out even more as Bach goes into an enharmonic change.⁸ He uses the same strangely disturbing means to depict straying far and wide in the

⁸ He gives, successively, the impressions of G minor and E major.

tenor recitative from the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele*. Note that this recitative also begins on a dissonant chord (ex. 8.3).

The image displays a musical score for a tenor recitative and a basso continuo line. The tenor part is written on a single staff in G major (one sharp) and common time. The lyrics are in German and English. The basso continuo line is written on a single staff in G major, with figured bass notation below the notes. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains the first two lines of the recitative, and the second system contains the next two lines. The lyrics are: "Ach! ich bin ein Kind der Sünden, ach! ich ir-re weit und breit, Der Sünden Aus-satz, Ah! I am a child of sin, ah! I stray far and wide, Sin's leprosy, so an mir zu fin-den, ver-lässt mich nicht in die-ser Sterblich-keit. which in me can be found, leaves me not in this mortal-life. (which can be found in me, never leaves me in peace in this mortal life.)". The figured bass notation includes figures such as 61, 41, 8, 7b, 3b, 41, 8, 5, 61, 41, 2b, 7b, 5, and 8, 2.

Ex. 8.3. *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/3, mm. 1–6.

In these last examples, the accompaniment serves only to sustain the vocal line by reinforcing the expression with harmonic coloring; but sometimes short descriptive figures are also mixed into it. Mattheson willingly concedes that, in general, composers enliven their music in this way: “We cannot criticize if, in some circumstances, a sort of little game of notes (“*lusus sonorum*”) comes up unexpectedly in the accompaniment; but it must remain discrete and not be turned into a principal concern.”⁹ It is through this means that, in a narrative from the cantata *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange*, in which the declamation has a great intensity of feeling, the basso continuo—very calm up to this point—unfurls a short motif formed from several rapid notes, as if to represent the beloved’s departure. A little further on, the bass leaps vivaciously, as if to represent the soaring of the comforted soul. The opening of this recitative is also very interesting for our study because its vocal line begins with the notes of the tonic chord stated in ascending order and followed by the seventh as the bass continues to sound the root. The melodic line is therefore found in discord with the accompaniment, and Bach stresses the dissonance by repeating the B four times so that our ears are submitted at length to the displeasure. By leaning on the dissonant note in this way he creates an image of the soul’s anxiety. The words say “So be, O soul, be content.” But on the last word before the appeasing chord brightens, Bach wants to

⁹ Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 201.

make us feel one more time the uneasiness of anguish by troubling us on the note right before the expected one—on which the voice arrives only laboriously, arrested near its apex, and touching upon it only to fall back down to where it began. But how he fully relishes it—this note finally conquered! How complacently he makes it return to the lower octave! He truly enjoys this cadence as a moment of peace, and we would hardly have to change any words in a passage often quoted from a book on aesthetics by Guyau in order for this segment of the recitative to be a precise musical illustration of it. For Bach, the tonic chord must cause this “profound” and “sweet” feeling of refreshment—like that evoked by touching ice to the brow of someone with a fever—in order to bring about Guyau’s “resurrection . . . of complete inner harmony.”¹⁰ A little farther on, the word “ganz” (completely) is marked by a held note, and “verlässt” (leave, abandon) is emphasized by being separated from the rest of the phrase with a brief silence that, as an almost overly ingenious detail,¹¹ also represents quite precisely this “brief moment” within which the soul has been deserted by the beloved. Then, unaccompanied, the voice hurls an exhortation to faith, where we once more see a word isolated like a shout (“Heart!—believe firmly”). After having again evoked some sorrowful ideas in a nearly uniform key that modulates only on the strong syllable of the adjective “bitt’rē” (bitter) to form a pictorial dissonance with the bass, Bach interprets the words that promise “comfort and the wine of joy” with part of an arpeggio and a motif adorned by a brief melisma. The text adds “virgin honey” to these gifts that God assures in exchange for tears shed here below—the reward for earthly bitterness. From this last contrast, Bach sets off a musical antithesis, as in some of the other examples just cited, where major and minor modes are opposed.

Here is the first part of this long recitative (ex. 8.4).

So sei, o See-le, sei zu-frieden! Wenn es vor dei-nen Au-gen
 So be, O soul, be content! If it to thine eyes
 (If it appear to thine eyes)

8

¹⁰ Jean-Marie Guyau, *Les Problèmes de l'Esthétique contemporaine* (Paris: 1884), 62.

¹¹ We have seen above (exs. 3.37a, b and preceding text) a similarly meaningful use of silences. It is certain that here the pictorial intention passes only to second place. Bach aims above all at the energy of the declamation.

seheint, als ob dein liebster Freund sich ganz - - - von dir ge -
appear, as if thy dearest friend himself completely from thee;
as if thy dearest friend hath completely removed himself from thee;

schieden; wann er dich kurze Zeit verlässt, Herz! glau-be fest, es wird ein Kleines sein, da
removed; when he thee for a short time doth leave, Heart! believe steadfastly, it will a short time be, till
when he doth leave thee for a short time, Heart! believe steadfastly, it will only be a short time, till

er für bit - re Zäh ren, dir Trost und Freu - - den-wein und Ho - nig
he for bitter tears, the wine of comfort and wine-of-joy and virgin honey
he shall grant thee the wine of comfort and joy

sein für Wer - muth will ge - wäg - - ren!
for wormwood shall grant thee!
for bitter tears; virgin honey for wormwood!!

Ex. 8.4. *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange*, BWV 155/3, mm. 1–11.

In the tenor recitative of the cantata *Christen, ätzet diesen Tag* the basso continuo also intervenes descriptively to growl on an ascending scale, followed by a descending arpeggio that ends with a falling octave when the tenor declaims “The lion of David’s tribe has appeared, his bow is bent, and the sword, with which he returns us to our former freedom, is already sharpened.” But here this formula is not only pictorial: the large pattern is repeated in different keys, giving the recitative a kind of fierce and threatening unity.¹² In the cantata *Sehet, welch eine*

¹² BWV 63/4, mm. 7–12.

Liebe hat uns der Vater erzeiget the bass merely plays two rising scales composed of sixteenth-notes with which Bach creates a picture that agrees with the text “Go, world! Keep what is thine. I seek and desire naught from thee.”¹³

Bach aptly organizes a persistent accompanimental motif here that links the different phrases of the recitative by surrounding it, so to speak, with a continuous decoration, and within it he resolves the dominant idea entirely through pure music. But let us not forget that, for him, “pure music” is only music that is more vaguely defined and that can satisfy several interpretations at the same time. From this perspective, an arpeggiated motif initially describes the action of walking when the singer says “So go then forth! You shepherds, go.” in the bass recitative of the cantata “for the second day of the celebration of Christmas” (*Christmas Oratorio*). Then, right afterward, the same motifs murmur gently—still in bright arpeggios, but in a swaying rhythm—when the text speaks of the child in the cradle beside which the shepherds, at the end of their pilgrimage, will be singing their lullaby.¹⁴

In the cantata *Ich will mein Kreuzstab gerne trage*, in which the “sojourn in the world” is compared to an ocean voyage, the cello accompanies the bass recitative with an incessant pulsing. But the movement is halted at the words “And when the furious foaming comes to an end, then I step out of my ship into my city, which is the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁵

We should recall again the floating oboe parts in the alto recitative of the cantata *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*, in which the instrumental rhythm constantly seems to contradict the rhythm of the vocal line, producing an impression of continual uneasiness: “In waiting there is danger; wouldst thou lose the opportunity? The God who was formerly merciful can easily lead thee before his judgment seat . . . blinded mind, ah, do turn back, so that the hour not find thee unprepared!”¹⁶

Sometimes this uniting of feelings that Bach wants to give the recitative is accomplished by means of a partly poetic and partly musical source. While the singer expresses the verbal contents of the libretto according to Bach’s usual procedures, the accompaniment juxtaposes a chorale melody to it, and—even without words—the hymn comes through in a recognizable way. As the familiar theme unfolds, it binds and dominates the disjointed fragments of declamation so that musical unity is assured, since the connecting phrases of the chorale form a well-defined whole. And this hymn-tune is too directly associated in the listeners’ minds from when it was sung with a definite text for it not to suggest to them the ideas embodied in it, even when it is only played on instruments. Early composers said “Numeros memini, si verba tenerem” (Remember the notes, but keep the words), and Bach is true to the astuteness of this dual maxim. He trusts that his

¹³ BWV 64/3, mm. 1–4.

¹⁴ BWV 248/18, mm. 1–9.

¹⁵ BWV 56/2, mm. 14–21.

¹⁶ BWV 102/6, mm. 1–6.

listeners will remember the words if just the melody alone is presented. In the recitative from the cantata *Du wahrer Gott und Davids Sohn*, the universal Christian prayer, symbolized by the melody of the chorale *Christe, du Lamm Gottes*,¹⁷ is coupled with the tenor voice that beseeches the Savior. In the cantata *Das neugeborne Kindelein*, the angels' hymn rises, crystalline, above the recitative in which the soprano describes their choirs.¹⁸ Then, in the cantata *Wo soll ich fliehen hin*, we hear the oboe stating in its entirety the melody of a chorale verse paraphrased in the recitative.¹⁹ Lastly, in the bass recitative that we cited above from the cantata *Wachet! betet!*, the trumpet resounds with the chorale of the "last judgment," during which the singer proclaims man's terror at the crumbling world's convulsion.²⁰

Continuing to examine Bach's tendency to use this new means of making himself understood, whose effect we noted in an earlier chapter, we see that it is not enough for him merely to follow the text in all the details that seem significant to him. He still wants to extract from it what is only implied. He wants to be composer of situations—just as much as he is composer of words, gestures, and shapes—and this interpretative breadth permits him to extend right on into abstract ideas. Therefore, the tenor recitative of the cantata *Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein*²¹ is accompanied in the basso continuo by the complete theme of the chorale from which the cantata takes its name, while elsewhere the tenor sings some slightly distorted fragments from the same hymn-tune. Here Bach seems to feel that this contrast between the complete chorale melody and the fragments, full of variants, makes the meaning of the words better understood. In fact, the singer bemoans the ways of those who abandon the sound doctrine of orthodoxy and interpret the word of God according to their intellectual whims, and Bach likewise opposes the simple statement of the chorale with its rambling variation.

Sometimes the instruments only realize the harmony without adding any particular motifs to the accompaniment, and a recitative accompanied in this way is generally considered to be very expressive. Johann Adolphe Scheibe approved of this approach in sacred music: "This form of recitative is more suited to stimulating and augmenting self-communion than the recitative sung freely and without orchestral accompaniment. It moves us more and penetrates more profoundly into our hearts. Since its words are articulated more slowly, and consequently more distinctly, they are better understood in the church. Lastly, I have noticed from experience that no type of recitative is more favorable to the listener's enlightenment than this one, and that, as a consequence, none can be less striking."²² Scheibe also says that one must have a regard in these recitatives for

¹⁷ BWV 23/2, mm. 1–6 et seq.

¹⁸ BWV 122/3, mm. 1–6 et seq.

¹⁹ BWV 5/4, mm. 1–6 et seq.

²⁰ BWV 70/9, mm. 4–10 et seq.

²¹ BWV 2/2, mm. 1–13.

²² Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus* (Leipzig: 1745), 748.

the feeling and the power of the words and that this type of accompaniment will have much more expressive intensity the more it is imbued with strangeness, while still remaining tuneful. And he adds: “The singer utters such a recitative more slowly and with more depth, and he will also need to observe the tempo more rigorously than in the ordinary recitative.”²³

D’Alembert writes of this recitative form: “Beyond the short recitative for the stage, which proceeds nearly as quickly as ordinary speech, the Italians have another kind they call “recitative obbligato” (necessary recitative)—that is to say, accompanied by instruments—which they often employ effectively in expressive pieces and especially in scenes of pathos.”²⁴

The recitative with orchestral accompaniment appears very early in German music. Heinrich Schütz already uses it in his *Historia von der Auferstehung Christi* (1623) in which the harmony of four violas da gamba surrounds the evangelist’s recitative with a mystical cloud.²⁵ In his *Sieben Worte Jesu Christi am Kreuz* (The Seven Last Words of Jesus Christ on the Cross) he has two instruments realize the basso continuo chords played while Christ sings.²⁶ On this subject, W. H. Kretzschmar notes that Schütz was able to borrow this procedure from operatic music where, “since Monteverdi, it was the practice to accompany the important discourse of principal characters not only with continuo but also with strings. During the second half of the 17th century it is an established custom in the old opera house in Venice that recitatives in frequent scenes conjuring up ghosts be accompanied by high, sustained chords in the strings. In his *Trionfo di fato* (Triumph of fate), Steffani makes use of these mysterious tones of the violins in the scene where Anchises and Hector’s shadows meet,”²⁷ and Johann Sebastiani uses violins to accompany Christ’s singing in his *St. Matthew Passion* (1642).²⁸ Bach similarly surrounds Jesus’s words with what Winterfeld calls a kind of holy radiance.²⁹ In the cantata *Ich lasse dich nicht*, the strings (first and second violins, violetta, and bass) support the tenor recitative “My dear Jesus, when I suffer vexation and trouble, then thou art my joy, in unrest my rest, and my soft bed in times of fear.” This phrase rests upon full chords that are nuanced by an expressive harmony whose dissonances heighten the declamation of the sorrowful words, and a garland of thirds renders delightfully languid the cadence following its last words evoking the idea of repose.³⁰ When the soprano tells of her fervent hope for heaven in the recitative from the cantata *Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem*

²³ Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus*, 748.

²⁴ Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, *Mélange de Littérature, d’Histoire et de Philosophie* (Amsterdam: 1759), 4:420.

²⁵ Heinrich Schütz, *Sämmtliche Werke* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1885–1927), vol. 1.

²⁶ Schütz, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 1.

²⁷ Hermann Kretzschmar, *Führer durch den Concertsaal* (Leipzig: 1895), 43.

²⁸ Johann Sebastiani, *Matthäus-Passion* (*Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, series 1, vol 17).

²⁹ Carl Winterfeld, *Der evangelische Kirchengesang* (Leipzig: 1845), 3:372.

³⁰ BWV 157/3, mm. 1–6 et seq.

Glücke, the violins suddenly rise up as if to form a luminous dome above her voice—representing the passionate flight of the soul and, at the same time, giving rise to an image of the bright immensity that attracts it. Then, to better show greediness of desire, Bach colors the great, expansive orchestral chord dissonantly.³¹ Here again the accompaniment helps, as d'Alembert said, to “express the soul’s tones.”³²

On the other hand, in the cantata *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen*, the string section adds something picturesque to the recitative.³³ The soprano speaks of worshiping in a temple, and, according to a procedure that we have already examined, the instruments imitate the congregation murmuring its prayers.³⁴

Again in the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* it is the accompanied recitative that interprets the tenor’s noble lamentations with a similar progression in which the vocal plaints and the heart-rending instrumental chords knot themselves together.³⁵

Part two of this cantata opens with a dialogue recitative also accompanied by strings in which the soprano sings “Ah Jesus, my repose, my light, where stayest thou?” This sentence is wonderfully expressed, and after the first words of invocation, the voice almost sinks into gloom and vacillation at the memory of lost repose; then it becomes energized anew in appealing to the God of light and in exclaiming ever more exaltedly “Where stayest thou?” The orchestra wonderfully interprets this increasing liveliness with the first violins playing an ascending scale quite simply—beginning with half-notes and ending in quarter-notes—that shows the growing power of feeling through the acceleration of rhythm and the rising of the melodic line. The bass responds to the soprano’s questioning “Oh soul, look! I am with thee,” and he speaks vigorously, ascending to a high note, then coming back down to the tonic, as if to resolve with a definite conclusion this questioning sentence that she has left in suspense. Before the bass has begun, the strings are already hovering. Celestial radiance precedes the divine vision, and as soon as he pronounces the first syllables, the violins and violas repeat the chord that they have already been holding, accenting it for the second time in the measure while the instrumental bass descends one step from B flat to A flat. The tonic chord of B flat that the orchestra has held is transformed into a dominant-seventh chord, and it announces the key of E flat. The instruments complete the anticipated cadence just as the basso continuo glides from the A flat to the G, where it remains as the first violins descend right away by an interval of a twelfth to an E flat. Laid out this way, the strings resound in solemn harmonies, and the accompaniment—already darkened by the instruments’ low register formed on a sixth chord—takes on a decisive and insecure character here. The soprano continues “With me? Indeed

³¹ BWV 84/4, mm. 7–8.

³² Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus*, 421.

³³ BWV 51/2, mm. 1–8.

³⁴ See ex. 4.1 and following text.

³⁵ BWV 21/4, mm. 5–6, 14–15.

naught is here but night,” and the vehement questioning gushes forth on an interval of a seventh, then the voice drops back down, muffled, on the last word (night). Christ’s voice resumes, accompanied by a steady harmony: “I am thy faithful friend, who also keeps watch in the darkness, where naught but rogues are to be found.” The first words of this sentence are declaimed broadly, and on the word “wacht” (watch) the voice rises, as if to better declare the power of this protection and to affirm its brilliance with a radiant note. The harmony changes at the same time, and the end of the clause is portrayed in the orchestra by a flow of chords that undulates with a sinuous and tortuous grace. Through this commentary by the strings, Bach undoubtedly wishes to evoke an image of the versatile treachery of the evil spirit ready to lead the soul along dark and alluring paths. On the other hand, a bright chord is partnered with the appeal “Please break in with thy radiance and light of comfort.” Then, on a higher note, the strings revive this harmony with a crystalline sound that is dominated by the fifth, and the recitative ends solemnly and tenderly on the bass’s words: “The hour already comes, when thy battle’s crown will be a sweet refreshment for thee.” These last words are adorned with an elegant and gently floating melisma, proclaimed, as well, by the first violins, whose part has a simple rhythm and the pleasant swaying of the motifs of welcome and smiling cheerfulness.³⁶

Arioso

Actually, the conclusion of this recitative is no longer in recitative style because the alternating musical responses abate, and, by contrast, the bass’s final lines become more languid in a broad lyrical phrase where all is grounded in great serenity.

Furthermore, this ending distinguishes itself through a different movement from that of the dialog that has gone before. The freedom of the recitative delivered at will by singers is no longer allowed here, and Bach indicates that the motion changes rigorously by marking “a tempo” above this passage.³⁷ It could just as well have been called “arioso” because it is not only by rhythmic regularity that an arioso diverges from an ordinary recitative.³⁸ The very fluid character of the accompanimental motifs here emerges merely as a reflection of the melodic expansiveness occurring in the vocal line. Friedrich Erhardt Niedt, in part three of his *Musikalische Handleitung*, advises the use of the arioso for giving more expressive power to a recitative’s principal phrases.³⁹ Therefore, the ending of

³⁶ See exs. 3.25a–o and preceding text.

³⁷ BWV 21/7, mm. 11–15.

³⁸ Mattheson states this explicitly in *Kern melodischer Wissenschaft*, 95.

³⁹ This work was published in 1717 by Mattheson after the author’s death. See Friedrich Erhardt Niedt, *Musikalische Handleitung dritter und letzter Theil* (Hamburg: 1717), 56–57.

Bach's recitative that we have been examining can then be called an arioso, since it is entirely of that nature. It is the same with some passages in the bass recitative of the cantata *Mein Gott, wie lang*—in which the declamation softens⁴⁰—as well as with numerous recitative endings in which the voice and instruments are matter-of-factly deployed to describe a lasting state of soul or to summarize a scene by emphasizing its most outstanding feature. Whether or not they are entitled as such, these passages must be considered ariosos. We can also cite as an example the eloquent phrases that follow the bass recitative from the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele*.⁴¹ In the cantata *Ärgre dich, o Seele, nicht* a bass recitative that begins with some curses ends in an arioso composed with standard formulas and accompanied by a steady bass line that ushers in repose while the other instruments outline a sequence of harmonious arabesques in triple arcs that follow each other like small, bright clouds in the summer sky.⁴² At the beginning of the cantata *Gott soll allein mein Herze haben* the phrases of the arioso alternate with the recitative phrases, and, in the manner of a refrain, the alto repeats "God alone shall have my heart." On each reprise of the arioso, the first two measures are repeated without change. By this means, Bach affirms the constancy of the feeling of abandonment to God, and it is the expressive unity that determines the unity of the work as a whole—free like an improvisation at the same time as it is coordinated like a poem with a set form, but without apparent constraint.⁴³ The same mixing of independence and symmetry is also found in the cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*, in which the alto arioso unfolds in short phrases of the same meter but with a changing melodic line—albeit composed with similar figures. Thus there is a wonderful link between the different parts of the development—as well as a marvelous equality of form—throughout this hymn of the soul that offers itself confidently and without reservation to God's will.⁴⁴

In his *Gedanken von der Opera*, Barthold Feind only allows for the recitative arioso—or recitativo obligato—if the divisions of the poetry call for the use of this form, or only if one wants to express a particular feeling.⁴⁵ The ariosos that I have pointed out are from this last category, and we can consider them as episodes of pathos, in which the sparse emotion of the narratives that prepare or explain them is concentrated.

Bach sometimes develops the arioso with a certain breadth. For example, the one already cited from the cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen* has no less than fifty measures, but it has a rather lively rhythm (3/8). And, in the *St. John Passion*, a wonderful bass arioso unfolds whose vocal line is only a simple declamation, while the violas d'amore and the lute surround it with a very organized and highly

⁴⁰ BWV 155/3, mm. 17–26.

⁴¹ BWV 78/5, mm. 17–27.

⁴² BWV 186/7, mm. 14–19.

⁴³ BWV 169/2, mm. 9–26 et seq.

⁴⁴ BWV 72/2a, mm. 1–11 et seq.

⁴⁵ Feind, *Deutsche Gedichte*, 79.

unified accompaniment.⁴⁶ In several narratives in arioso form from the *St. Matthew Passion*, the accompaniment similarly reconciles the different phrases of the vocal line; furthermore, the instruments have a remarkably descriptive importance to them. So, in the arioso from part one, the oboes d'amore join a floating harmony to the words "Even though my heart swims in tears."⁴⁷ Later on, it is the portrayal of Christ's scourging that Bach paints for us through some rhythmically jerky motifs.⁴⁸ Nearly everything at the end—a crepuscular music with quivering lines and misty contours—is combined with the recitative in which the bass recalls, with an unforgettable eloquence, the wonders of the "evening hour."⁴⁹

In the *Christmas Oratorio* Bach mingles the arioso and the recitative with a unique ability. For example, after the first chorus of the cantata *Fallt mit Danken* (Prostrate yourselves in thanksgiving)—which forms the fourth part of the oratorio—and after several words where the evangelist tells how the Messiah received the name Jesus, the bass unfurls a tender litany of invocations to Emmanuel: "O sweet word! My Jesus is my shepherd. My Jesus is my life . . . My Jesus refreshes the heart and breast." This long effusion of loving words is condensed into an arioso hymn that is more sustained than in the zealous bass narrative "Jesus, thou, my dearest life, my soul's bridegroom, thou who didst give thyself for me on the bitter cross's beam!" During this vocal line the bass never ceases to pour himself out in prayers, and when the soprano stops singing he resumes his recitative.⁵⁰ Then, immediately after the aria following this narrative (the "Echo aria"), a duet appears that again combines arioso and recitative. Its arrangement is the same: the bass holds forth with an ardent tenderness while the soprano sings with a contemplative one. And these nuances of feeling embody very well the two types of free melodic line that Bach juxtaposes here: one, more supple and exalted but somewhat jolting and almost too choppy at times; the other, broad, issuing from a single stream and wonderfully peaceful yet always with warmth.⁵¹

The arioso has yet another role in the sacred works. Faithful to the established tradition,⁵² it is in the arioso form that Bach composes music to words that the Scripture presents as having been addressed to men by God himself, by Christ, or by the Holy Spirit. The examples are numerous and of great majesty. This intermediary form—richer in melodic line than the recitative and less affected than the aria—suits perfectly this solemn and merciful, but generally not very extensive, address. Even in the recitatives where it figures only as a summons, the

⁴⁶ BWV 245/19, mm. 1–6 et seq.

⁴⁷ BWV 244/18, mm. 1–5 et seq.

⁴⁸ BWV 244/60, mm. 1–5 et seq.

⁴⁹ BWV 244/64, mm. 1–4 et seq.

⁵⁰ BWV 248/38, mm. 1–22 et seq.

⁵¹ BWV 248/40, mm. 1–8 et seq.

⁵² See Spitta, *J. S. Bach* (1873), 1:463, and (1880), 2:301.

divine word assumes the solemn style of the arioso. In the cantata *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen*, the accompaniment becomes picturesque and the vocal line takes a more sustained melodic turn when, in the course of his narrative, the tenor recalls the Savior's words "My grave and dying brings you life. My rising is your comfort."⁵³ It is the same in the cantata *Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein* when the bass has told of the laments of the poor in a pathos-filled recitative, and he intones God's reply "My healing word shall be the strength of the poor." Here, the usual broken language of the recitative would be too devoid of this long-awaited mercy from the Lord; but by joining melodic phrases to passages that are ordinarily declaimed more simply, Bach gives these merciful words a consoling gentleness while he keeps them from having any overt delight that might weaken them. This assuaging voice remains strong and never lapses into an accommodating indulgence.⁵⁴ Bach appeals to the penetrating poetics of the arioso where the insistence of the words and the motifs act with an irresistibly persuasive charm: in the cantata *Jesus schläft*, when Jesus asks his apostles "Ye of little faith, why are ye so fearful?";⁵⁵ in the cantata *Siehe, ich will viel Fischer aussenden*, when He reassures Simon and proclaims to him that, henceforth, he will "catch men";⁵⁶ and in the cantata *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*, when the voice of the Holy Spirit changes the frightful mystery of death into blessedness.⁵⁷ In the *St. Matthew Passion* Bach elevates himself even higher with the arioso where the words sung to introduce the Lord's Supper reach the sublime—through the uninterrupted progression of feeling and by this ever-increasing soaring of enthusiasm shown on the fullness of the consonant harmonies and the expansiveness of the even rhythms in the strings.⁵⁸

* * *

Aria with Several Stanzas

In his cantatas, Bach gives the name "aria" to vocal pieces of somewhat differing forms. P. Spitta notes justifiably that in the cantata *Gott ist mein König* (1708) he gives the title "Aria con Corale" to a melody treated in arioso style, while he calls a bass aria of nearly classic design an "arioso."⁵⁹ This difference is

⁵³ BWV 66/4, mm. 12–14.

⁵⁴ BWV 2/4, mm. 7–18.

⁵⁵ BWV 81/4, mm. 1–12 et seq.

⁵⁶ BWV 88/4, mm. 3–14 et seq. This page is designated under the name "aria" but has all the characteristics of a developed arioso formed in two parts—the first of which ends on the dominant, and the second has the orchestral bass repeating an ostinato motif all the way through.

⁵⁷ BWV 60/4, mm. 1–9 et seq.

⁵⁸ BWV 244/17, mm. 25–40.

⁵⁹ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:344.

easily explained: in Bach's time, the term "aria" had a more extensive general meaning than the one we are accustomed to giving it. Johann Gottfried Walther, in his *Musicalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig: 1732), gives this definition: "In general, the name 'aria' suits every melody, whether vocal or instrumental. But, in particular, the 'aria' is a melody that is sung, which, according to the composition of the words and the good intentions of their author, is usually formed in a continuous vocal line or divided into two portions. The songs formerly in use and composed of several verses were of the first type, and they were sung in one stretch without pauses. If the words permitted it, these arias had repeats, and one could also ornament the refrains between each verse. But these songs ("Lieder"), or stanzas, have given way to the arias of today that have two principal segments and at least as many—if not more—sections so that the singer can take a little more breath and so that there is an opportunity to embellish the composition here and there with instruments or basso continuo."⁶⁰

For Walther, the early aria had a serious disadvantage for the performer because of presenting every poem in couplets. In one stanza, the meaning could be complete at the end of the first, second, third, or fourth lines, but in other stanzas, the textual phrasings could be quite otherwise. So, if the same music is indiscriminately adapted to each of these diversely layed-out stanzas, it no longer agrees with the text and it upsets the connection of the phrases. This fault was recognized for a long time. For example, Hunold recommended that poets take care, when dealing with this type of aria, to put words of the same length in the succeeding stanzas following the first one, and, if possible, to use words composed with the same vowels as the first. In fact, he says a passage sung on an "a" in the first stanza will become very disagreeable if it falls on an "i" or a "u" in another stanza. But sometimes composers were only concerned with the first stanza, and Hunold cites an aria with two stanzas in an opera that he heard in which the composer produced a farcical duplication of words in the second stanza—not foreseeing that the repetition, while possible in the first stanza, became ridiculous in the following one. But the worst, Hunold adds, is when, in an aria with several verses, one of them has a sad feeling and the other a joyous one, yet the music remains the same for each.⁶¹

Hunold proposes two ways of escaping incoherence: either the composer arranges his composition in such a way that the different stanzas agree without there being a conflict in the music or pronunciation, or he writes a specific melodic line for each verse. The alto aria from the cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen* is conceived in such a way that one of these two procedures recommended by Hunold is used in it. The third and fourth lines are sung on the same notes as the first two. But Bach has known how to choose his motifs quite skillfully so that when they are

⁶⁰ Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon*, 46.

⁶¹ Christian Friedrich Hunold, *Die allerneueste Art, zur reinen und galanten Poesie zu gelangen* (Hamburg: 1712), 218.

adapted to different words they agree with those of the second group of lines as well as those of the initial one. In fact, let us first consider the text that Salomon Franck⁶² writes: "With all that I have and am, I will relinquish myself to Jesus." The two following lines are: "Though my weak spirit and mind cannot comprehend the Most-High's counsel." In the first period of the aria—after several notes of a rather simple melodic line but in which the important words are well emphasized—Bach has the voice leap an interval of an octave and continue on with repeated notes. There is a sort of surge and something obstinate occurring here⁶³ that we have noted earlier with these repeated-note motifs that he uses to express energy and persistent will.⁶⁴ Furthermore, through this large movement of an octave, he arouses the listener's attention and acts with the same force as an orator who accompanies certain important words with an impassioned gesture. He also repeats the words "will I myself" by joining them to an ascending arpeggio—a theme of resolve and fullness⁶⁵—and he lays out a falling melisma on the last word, which portrays the idea of confidence and complete submission (ex. 8.5).

Mit Al-lein was ich hab' und bin, mit Al-lein was ich hab' und bin, will ich mich
 With all that I have and am, with all that I have and am, will I myself
 (will I relinquish myself)

Je - su, will ich mich Je - su las - - - sen
 to Jesus, will I myself to Jesus relinquish
 to Jesus, will I relinquish myself to Jesus)

Ex. 8.5. *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*, BWV 72/2b, mm. 1–5.

In the second stanza, the motif formed from the octave and the repeated notes is joined to the words "the counsel of the Most-High." The idea of tenacity survives in this portion of the text, and the melodic line employed right at first—to signify the will of the soul determined to surrender itself to Jesus—retains all its expressive value here. The breadth of the last motif and the windings of the final melisma correspond equally, and with sufficient precision, to the meaning of the words in the fourth line.⁶⁶ Far from being in disagreement with the text, the repeated motif adds, through a new symbol, to the translation of the precept that

⁶² 1659–1725.

⁶³ BWV 72/2b, mm. 16–24.

⁶⁴ See ex. 2.1 and preceding text.

⁶⁵ See exs. 1.30a–e and preceding text.

⁶⁶ We find the word "fassen" (comprehend) joined, like this, to a melisma formed from rather wide intervals as cited in ex. 1.33a, b ("umfassen").

dominates the entire cantata: “the Christian who submits his entire will to the will of God.” Words that tell of self-abandonment to Christ and that evoke God’s plans are reflected in the same music as if, by this concordance, Bach wanted to give a profound interpretation of the maxim of the old German mystics: “Living in the bosom of God’s will is to be delivered from this will.”⁶⁷

As for Hunold’s advice to change the melodic line for each group of textual lines, Bach also puts this into practice. For instance, in the cantata *Herr, wie du willst*, when he writes a different vocal line for each of the three proposals that comprise the bass aria, he is at one with the sense of this precept. The text of this aria is “Lord if thou wilt, then press, ye pangs of death, these groans out of my heart, if only my prayer be acceptable to thee . . . Lord, if thou wilt, then lay down my members in dust and ashes—this most corrupted image of sin . . . Lord, if thou wilt, then strike, ye bells of death, I follow unfrightenend; my misery is henceforth stifled.”⁶⁸ Phrase by phrase, Bach recites this poem of Christian submission. He does not pass over a single detail: all the images of the text radiate from the music—but never with the brilliance or the vain expansiveness that we find in certain other composers’ luxuriant arias where there is a bit of showy excess, some misuse of figures, or a stream of melismas. Bach adheres to the declamation here and completes it through the orchestra’s discourse, but to better understand the meaning of this aria we must not forget that it is announced by a recitative where we again find this doctrine of the annihilation of human will that allows itself to be absorbed by the will of God. The words we hear are those of the Christian “taught through God’s spirit, who learns to immerse himself in God’s will and says ‘Lord, if thou wilt,’” etc. The aria, therefore, is directly linked to the recitative; but immediately after the first words, the singer yields to the orchestra, and it is the instruments that announce the two motifs that, along with the first motif stated by the voice, will reappear throughout this whole aria and give it musical unity. In the recitative, the poet has deplored the vice of “our will . . . that never wants to bear dying in mind,” and from the beginning of the aria the violins play one of the themes that Bach usually employs to evoke the idea of the sepulcher; so the idea of death is presented right away. Here is this theme, in which we easily recognize a variation of the burial themes that we have noted in an earlier chapter⁶⁹ (ex. 8.6a). Another motif is combined with it: the motif of will—a straight-forward and vigorous one with an energetic rhythm made up of a large, consonant interval and followed by repeated notes (ex. 8.6b).

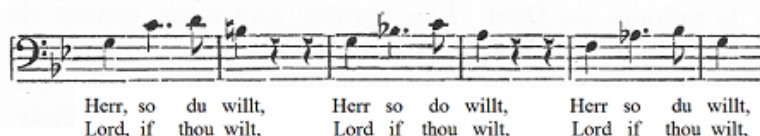
⁶⁷ This maxim is attributed to Meister Eckhart.

⁶⁸ BWV 73/4, mm. 1–20 et seq.

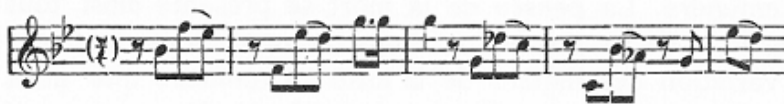
⁶⁹ See exs. 5.2a–c and preceding text.

Ex. 8.6a. *Herr, wie du willst*, BWV 73/4, mm. 2–4.Ex. 8.6b. *Herr, wie du willst*, BWV 73/4, mm. 3–5.

These two motifs are mingled together in the accompaniment to the first vocal phrase, and this phrase itself is based on one of the themes of sorrow and death. So it is easy to see in this descending progression that, while repeating the words, Bach draws upon the chromatic sequence used so frequently in 17th-century funeral scenes⁷⁰ (ex. 8.7).

Ex. 8.7. *Herr, wie du willst*, BWV 73/4, mm. 7–12.

In the accompaniment to the next measures, the even motif of drowsiness appears,⁷¹ and here it almost has the monotonous snoring of a death rattle. Elsewhere, the violins restate the voice's broken moans. But in the midst of this realistic description of sighs, and while the singer sorrowfully emphasizes the word evoking the pangs of death, Bach recalls the theme of the will of God through several domineering notes (ex. 8.8).

Ex. 8.8. *Herr, wie du willst*, BWV 73/4, mm. 12–16.

In this aria, this insistent motif has the same expressive importance as the horn's short theme in the first chorus from the same cantata, where it resounds with an intensity that is always unexpected. We constantly await it, and yet it always

⁷⁰ See exs. 2.47a–c and preceding text.

⁷¹ See exs. 5.26a–b and preceding text.

takes us by surprise—a strange symbol of fate. However, in the subsequent stanzas we no longer hear it, except when it is joined with the actual words it portrays. The moment the text suggests distinct images of burial, the orchestra is entirely given over to its descriptions. We find some signs here, then, that Bach has familiarized us with: descending scales and slowly repeated chords—figures of ruin, collapse, fainting, and, lastly, the muted tolling of bells. The distinct orchestral motifs are replaced by a low throbbing of pizzicato notes while all the representations of death's menace have given way to the portrayal of its acceptance. The death knell has nothing tragic about it: it is a quiet prayer of bells that cradles the chosen soul. Moreover, the melody has some unified passages describing the confident Christian's journey toward serene realms and proclaiming to us the appeasing of his heart. A repeating of the words "Lord, if thou wilt" forms the ending, in which the orchestral patterns reappear that were sketched before. But the theme of "God's will" only comes forth at the end in the final instrumental statement.

The balance in this composition, then, is assured by the intervention of the strings. So the instruments add not only an ingenious and profound commentary through what Mattheson called a "play of sounds,"⁷² but they also enclose this declamation—so independent and expressive—by re-connecting the scattered fragments put there intentionally for proportion. Whereas, if we consider the vocal line alone, we only find a sequence of juxtaposed stanzas in it, but the orchestra gives us a perfectly constructed organism—a whole in which we discern a harmonic symmetry. We could almost say that the vocal part of this aria is nothing more than a long arioso accompanied by instruments like an aria in the Italian style, with an exposition, a sort of development, a second motif, and a final repeat. But I admit that this comparison of the accompaniment with the Italian aria remains very imperfect: an aria never allows for a purely harmonic second motif, and, in the "conventional" aria form, its music evolves with more precision than in this wavering sketch. But the great contrast between the first and second idea here is altogether in the spirit of the aria, and Bach quite often makes use of this resource. Without treating it strictly as an aria, this page of orchestral score seems to us—from its design and its intentions—a draft for one. With this accompaniment, he has given the composition a balanced proportion that elevates its style without undermining the simplicity of its plaintive language. If there is a form here, the feeling does not suffer constraint, and after having celebrated the peace of death, Bach no longer has to return to the beginning to represent anew the distress of life's final moments. He repeats only the ever-pertinent words "Lord, if thou wilt," and the instrumental conclusion revives only the image of the sepulcher and the "theme of will."

⁷² "One would not know how to disapprove if, in some circumstances, a little play of tones ("lusus sonorum") happened unexpectedly in the accompaniment." (Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 201.)

Da Capo Aria

Sometimes it is quite otherwise when Bach employs the Italian aria with its reprise of the original vocal lines. However, it is possible that returning to the beginning phrase can lack plausibility. For instance, the da capo in the duo aria from the cantata *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen* revives some ideas of anxiety and some complaints after the second part of the aria has proclaimed consolation. The alto sings "I feared indeed the grave's darkness and lamented that my salvation now be snatched away." Then the aria ends on these words, when the second motif is coupled to those that celebrate joy regained and assured: "Now my heart is full of comfort, and though my foe gets angry, I will know how to conquer in God."⁷³ In this form, the linking of contradictory propositions is a recipe for nonsense if the first one does not express the dominant thought to which the entire situation is finally brought back. But, this having been said, a certain diversity of ideas between the two parts of the text merely inspires Bach to enliven the work through opposing rhythms and the differences of well-crafted motifs.

Bach made frequent use of these contrasts between pictures and motions. For example, the tenor aria in the cantata *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost* is written on these two sentences: "Where will refuge for my spirit be found in this vale of tears?" and "Only to Jesus's fatherly hands would I turn in my weakness." The first part of the aria is deeply melancholic with a theme comprised of bleak intervals—minor sixths, diminished fifths—and its monotonous and broken bass accompaniment remains inert while the solitary flute murmurs its wandering melismas. In the second part, marked "vivace," all is enlivened: the movement becomes continuous, the melody has some climbing progressions that build in energy, the bass accentuates the rhythmic balancing, and the flute hastens, flowering the vocal line with even and orderly arabesques. Here is the beginning of the introduction (ex. 8.9a), the first measures of the voice part (ex. 8.9b), and the beginning of the second part (ex. 8.9c) with the flute motif that Bach unfurls in it (ex. 8.9d).



Ex. 8.9a. *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*, BWV 114/2, mm. 1–5.⁷⁴

⁷³ We encounter a similar error of interpretation caused by the use of the "da capo" in the tenor aria of the cantata *Ach, lieben Christen* (BWV 114) and in the first chorus of the cantata *Es erhub sich ein Streit* (BWV 19).

⁷⁴ The basso cointinuo should be transposed an octave lower.

Tenor

Wo wird in die - - sem Jam - mer - ta - - le für mein - nen
Where will in this vale - of - tears, for my
(Where in this vale of tears will

Geist die Zu - flucht sein?
spirit refuge be found?
refuge be found for my spirit?)

Ex. 8.9b. *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*, BWV 114/2, mm. 13–17.

Vivace

Al - lein zu Je - su Va - ter - hän - den will ich mich in der
Only to Jesus's fatherly hands would I in my
(Only to Jesus's fatherly hands would I turn in my

Schwachheit wen - den
weakness turn
weakness)

Ex. 8.9c. *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*, BWV 114/2, mm. 55–57.

Flauto traverso

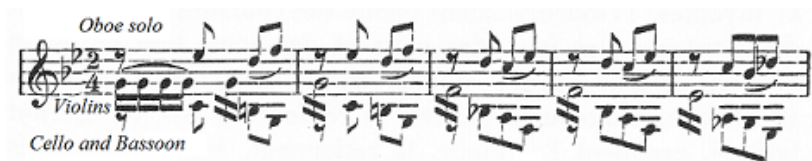
Ex. 8.9d. *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*, BWV 114/2, mm. 2–4.

In the alto aria of the cantata *Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbaths* the rhythm also changes in the second part: “Where two or three are assembled in Jesus’s precious name, Jesus appears there amidst them and speaks thereto the ‘Amen’ . . . For what is done out of love and need . . . does not break the Most High’s ordinance.”⁷⁵ The second motif in the aria at the beginning of the cantata *Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen* is written in triplets, and Bach wants to express, through the lightening of the rhythm, the joy of the soul who, having

⁷⁵ BWV 42/3, mm. 46–56.

accepted the cross, arrives right beside God: "There I lay my cares into the grave all at once, there my Savior himself wipes away my tears."⁷⁶ In the bass of from the cantata *Wohl dem, der sich auf seinen Gott*, after the dejected melodic line at the beginning, a rapid phrase mixed with bright arpeggios corresponds to the idea of divine help.⁷⁷ And we find a similar example of rhythmic alternation in the bass aria of the cantata *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott*. This aria is, in fact, written in a very particular form where the return, at the end, of a period that appears at the beginning gives it a certain structural steadiness. So it seems more organized than an arioso, but in its detail the composition is very free—even the phrase that assures its unity is not stated in the aria's beginning and ending key.⁷⁸

These rhythmic changes have a great dramatic effect, and they are familiar to theatre composers. For example, Elmira's aria in scene two of Reinhard Keiser's opera *Croesus* has a very expressive rhythmic and modal instability. Its beginning is anxious, accompanied by oboe sighings, and it is darkened by the violins' steady trembling (ex. 8.10a). The text speaks of hope, but here again it is disturbance that dominates: "Still hope, still hope," says Elmira in a nearly failing voice that barely recovers the energy to utter dolefully the words "Wounded heart" (ex. 8.10b). On the other hand, the motifs brighten and spread out when she sings "However, love consoles me" (ex. 8.10c). In the bass line, where the cello and bassoon serve only to emphasize the oboe's broken sobs, Keiser writes even notes that evoke the harmony of the major tonic chord. The oboe takes up the limpid soprano motif again, and lastly, a faster tempo (*allegro assai*) adds further to this contrast of themes reflecting the contrast of feelings.



Ex. 8.10a. Reinhard Keiser, *Croesus* (second version)/7, mm. 1–5.

⁷⁶ BWV 56/1, mm. 120–130.

⁷⁷ BWV 139/4, mm. 20–37.

⁷⁸ BWV 127/4, mm. 11–21.

hof-fe noch, hof-fe noch, hof-fe noch, ge-kränk-tes
still hope, still hope, still hope, wounded

Herz, hof-fe noch
heart, still hope

Ex. 8.10b. Reinhard Keiser, *Croesus* (second version)/7, mm. 17–23.

Doch die Lie-be trös - - tet mich
However, love comforts me

Ex. 8.10c. Reinhard Keiser, *Croesus* (second version)/7, mm. 53–54.⁷⁹

Lyric Value of this Form

If we now consider by itself the Italian aria of normal length in which the text is not disrupted, but in which the composer does not upset the form for the sake of the text, we will recognize that this type of aria has definite expressive qualities—although a little affected and sometimes redundant—and that it is not just a bravura piece for the singer or a brilliant miscalculation by the composer. First of all, it delights us with its harmonious arrangement, whose well-balanced configuration Combarieu accurately appreciated. He writes that “The aria, with its construction,” has for him “the advantage, albeit superficial, of all that is symmetrical and well-proportioned; its cleanly concluded contours give it its rightful grandeur—this ‘mediocre aliquid’ (little something)—without which the perception of a work of art becomes boring: it is, ultimately, more capable than the recitative of transmitting the musical thought. We can reproach it for shaping the expression of the feeling too much and for replacing truth with pleasure, but it gives the melodic line a fullness of flourish unknown in nature.”⁸⁰ Furthermore, the Italian aria unfolds determinedly. Through its great rhythmic unity, continuous balancing of phrases of the same proportion, expectation of the principal motif and its sudden appearances, disguises, and the surprise at recognizing it, the fascination with following its path of expected cadences, the craft in its anticipated and

⁷⁹ I cite this opera according to a copy preserved in the Paris Conservatory library.

⁸⁰ Jules Combarieu, *Les Rapports de la Musique et de la Poésie* (Paris: 1893), 319.

vanishing conclusions, the stupefaction of its runs and brilliant flourishes, the play of words and notes—in a word, all that we can foresee and all that astonishes us in such varied resources that are sustained, united, and reinforced by the lyrical current—seize the listener, hold him, put him in a state of admiring stupor and fascinate him. But I speak here of the listener for whom the aria still seemed a new form, held an appeal because of its difficulty, and—though so clear to us now that it seems commonplace—had a bit of mysteriousness that he enjoyed as if he needed to be alone to understand it. Lecerf de la Viéville says, in his second dialogue in *Comparaison de la Musique italienne et de la Musique française*, “What joy, what good opinion of himself does not a man have who knows something of Corelli’s fifth opera.”⁸¹ Along with the above reasons appears another similar objection to the Italian aria in vogue at the beginning of the 18th century. In general, we find it long, tiring, and we often judge it with the same irreverence that we might judge one of Boileau’s odes. However, the difference can be great, and any aria emanating from Scarlatti’s pen—admired and taken up everywhere—is a work of inspiration.

Barthold Feind declares that arias in opera are “the explanation of the recitative, of what is more elegant and ingenious in the poetry, and the ‘soul of the scene.’”⁸² For Mattheson, the aria “expresses a great emotion of the soul.”⁸³ For Tilgner, the “da capo” seems a carry-over from biblical poetry. “Others,” he writes, “reject the da capo, which, I would say, is so pleasant—almost out of necessity—and so devout among the sacred arias. They do not remember David, the prophet king, whose eighth psalm begins and ends its sublime prophecy of Christ’s kingdom with the words ‘O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!’”⁸⁴ Mattheson also cites this declamation and quotes a number of other examples drawn from the psalms that would authorize the use of the da capo in sacred music even more. So, he points out a triple da capo “quite like a round” in Psalm 80, in Psalm 107 a quadruple da capo “as in a rondo aria” (verses 8, 15, 21, and 31), and in Psalm 118, a simple but strict da capo “since it ends exactly as it begins: ‘O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good.’” In Psalm 139, he again finds a da capo “although the words be somewhat re-arranged and changed, as often happens elsewhere in composition today,” but the meaning stays the same: “O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me . . . Search me, O God, and know my heart,” etc.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Jean-Louis Lecerf de la Viéville, *Comparaison de la Musique italienne, et de la Musique française* (Brussels: 1704), 48. The work by Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) cited here is his collection of sonatas, etc., 1700.

⁸² Feind, *Deutsche Gedichte*, 95 (*Gedanken von der Opera*).

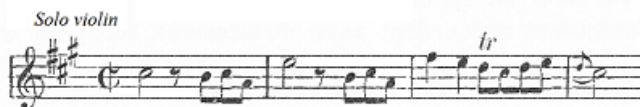
⁸³ Mattheson, *Kern melodischer Wissenschaft*, 95.

⁸⁴ Note here that, in the first chorus of the *St. John Passion* the first phrase of the text, which returns at the end, is formed from these words.

⁸⁵ Mattheson, *Der neu Gottingische . . . Ephorus* (Hamburg: 1727), 104.

Nurtured by holy books,⁸⁶ Bach must have marveled at being able to make use of a musical form in which the recurring thoughts of Hebrew poetry reappear with their magnificent undulations and in which something of the holy fervor that pours out in their repetitions and parallel phrases is brought back to life. In the cantata *Wir danken dir, Gott* the tenor aria with solo violin that begins with “hallelujah” has the same content of ideas and, on the whole, the same form as the psalms “at the beginning and end of which is found a hallelujah—psalms that,” Mattheson assures us, “present the most formal da capo there is in the world.”⁸⁷ Moreover, the effusive outpouring here is from necessity: this act of exalted thanks cannot be sung in an undertone and on a shallow breath. The upsurge of the music must correspond to the outburst in the text, and its soaring can never be too ambitious. A certain emphasis is permitted when it is a matter of leading the multitude to thankfulness: it takes great eloquence to move the throng. As spokesperson and virtual mediator for a city that the poet likens to Zion, Bach is never at risk in assuming too solemn a mode and overdoing the splendor when addressing God. He includes Leipzig’s name in this aria, and the work has a semi-political nature in the sense that it is composed for an official ceremony: the sacred service for celebrating the election of the city council (1731). So, it is fitting that jubilation, power, and radiance is shown in it. Here, in the aria form, he is free to unfurl himself and sing loud and long. Nothing weighs it down, nothing interrupts its sublime flight, and the prescribed boundaries only serve to render it immensity meaningful without diminishing it.

From the violin’s first bow strokes, Bach makes us gaze into infinity (ex. 8.11).



Ex. 8.11. *Wir danken dir, Gott*, BWV 29/3, mm. 1–4.

The accompaniment is clear, filled with arpeggiated motifs and even scales or scale fragments. The solo violin unrolls its lengthy lines in a simple atmosphere, and the voice spreads itself out effortlessly. Everything evolves in long curves laid out in a single movement and poured out almost effortlessly, but calmly, like rays of light that outline the flight of wood doves with gleaming plumage as they soar across a background of woods and hills on a sunny day.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ph. Spitta writes “Whoever studies Bach’s cantatas must recognize that his knowledge of the Bible is as profound as his knowledge of the chorales” (*J. S. Bach*, 2:750).

⁸⁷ Mattheson, *Der neu Gottingishche . . . Ephorus*, 104, at the end of note *f*. We also see that the “hallelujahs” in the mass and in Gregorian chant have this same cyclic form.

⁸⁸ BWV 29/3, mm. 1–28 et seq.

The bass aria in the first cantata of the *Christmas Oratorio*, in which the trumpet beams through the orchestra, gives us further evidence—if we are still looking for proof of this accord—of the fullness and brilliance that the aria form assures us through the combining of flamboyant words and sumptuous sonorities. Bach wants the “imposing master and powerful king” to sing here, and as in all scenes of might, he triumphs through affinity. He has only to let his inner power show through so that the vocal line seems to spring from a breast of bronze, and the trumpet manifests an apocalyptic force as if it were blown by “the seven angels who stood before God.”⁸⁹

In the presence of works just as vigorous—just as alike in form as in poetry—that impart the same kinds of images and suggest marvelous ideas, we cannot fail to notice a glorious energy and an imperious pageantry that rightly depend on a huge breath and a fullness that sometimes overwhelms the modern listener who prefers short phrases but is inundated by long periods.

These two arias are sufficient to illustrate the import of the da capo aria in Bach's works.

Of course, we could examine many others in which the idea and the execution agree as closely—whether for expressing joy or power, or for recounting the never-ending poem of tears. But such a survey would extend this work far beyond all limits. In nearly every one of his cantatas—around two hundred⁹⁰—Bach shows us that the aria, the pre-eminent lyrical form, was for him a living form, fully impregnated with feeling and created in keeping with his sweeping genius.

* * *

French Duets

Before studying the compositions that Bach wrote for two voices, we must summarize the different forms of duo pieces that were employed in the 18th century. Mattheson shows them to us succinctly in the sixth chapter of his *Kern melodischer Wissenschaft* (1737) in which he distinguishes them as duets “senza stromenti” (without instruments) and “con strummenti” (with instruments) and defines them thus: “The duet is, in truth, still an aria, but of an entirely different kind; for in it one aims not only to give charm to the melodic line but to arrange it in a fugal or concertante manner and to produce a very fine harmony . . . The ‘duetto’—or the aria for two voices—is composed in the Italian or French style . . .

⁸⁹ BWV 248/8, mm. 1–28 et seq.

⁹⁰ [The total number of cantatas that Bach composed is 281, including both the sacred and secular ones as well as the ones comprising the Christmas and Easter oratorios, according to Boyd, *Bach*, 256–65, 269–71.—Trans.]

The French ‘airs à deux’ (duo arias) favor equal counterpoint; the voices sing the words at the same tempo, one after the other, and we find only a few concertante passages here and there . . . Such duets are still enjoyed, particularly in churches, and they are especially unified and easy to understand. But the Italian duets, by their intriguing and artful fugal nature, are far from having the simpler qualities of the French duets, and they can only be managed by the consummate performer. They give great pleasure to knowing ears—as much in a chamber music setting as in the church and in the theatre of Stefani’s day⁹¹ . . . Stefani himself is singularly well known for this type of composition above all others, and he deserves to serve as model up to the present.”

Among the duets that Bach wrote in the character of French “Airs à deux,” we can cite the one for soprano and alto in the cantata *Ärgre dich, o Seele nicht*,⁹² the “Et Misericordia” for alto and tenor from the *Magnificat*,⁹³ and Diana and Endymion’s duet in the birthday cantata for Duke Christian of Saxe-Weissenfels, *Was mir behagt*.⁹⁴ With regard to these duets, I refer to what I said earlier about the motifs grouped in consonant sequences—a union with which Bach symbolizes the harmonious feeling shown by two different characters at the same time.⁹⁵

Italian Duets

The duets in the Italian style are numerous in Bach’s work. This form permits him to express more fully the poetry in certain texts offered him. In it he finds both a developmental procedure and a means for suggestion. For example, in the alto and soprano duet of the cantata *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid I*, the motifs sung successively by the two voices pour out with a somber fullness, and the whole piece takes on a melancholy character because of this long thread of monotonous notes and restrained rhythms. In it the poet speaks of his vain attempt to sing a joyful prayer to Jesus, and Bach himself tries in vain to shake off the heavy cloak of mist that he has woven, so the dominant impression remains one of anguish. The even movement of notes accompanying the words “I will sing joyously to my Jesus” reveals obstinacy rather than joyfulness, and there is a kind of desperation in reacting to the sorrow. But of true joy, nothing: at this very moment the instruments repeat the theme of oppression and powerlessness associated with the first part of the phrase “When cares press upon me”

⁹¹ 1653–1728.

⁹² BWV 186/10.

⁹³ BWV 243/6.

⁹⁴ BWV 208/12.

⁹⁵ See ex. 4.11 and preceding text.

Furthermore, the melisma joined to the word “dringen” (press) has an odd weariness.⁹⁶

The same pattern with its bleak repetitions appears again in the second phrase of this duet and is repeated there in the minor mode on the words “Jesus helps carry my cross.” Therefore, a simple motif reigns over this entire composition. It weighs heavily from beginning to end—the persistent image of the burden under which everyone succumbs.

Dialogues

In the duet for alto and soprano from the cantata *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* Bach also employs the entangled style of Italian duets, but its music is more varied. The violins do not introduce the initial vocal lines as in the preceding duet, and the voices have more diversity. Here he has readily felt the contrasts of the texts, and he has never abandoned himself to intensely expressing merely a single idea that is dear to his own aggrieved soul. The sad words have, in fact, a less subjective meaning than in the duet I have just described. There is a question of poverty here, but it is Christ's poverty, and this very poverty is proof of our riches. The poet is inspired by a stanza from the chorale *Gelobet seist du* that reflects the Second Epistle from Paul to the Corinthians: “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor that ye through his poverty might be rich” (8:9). Martin Luther adds, in the chorale: “Equal with the splendor of angels.” For Bach, the text is bountiful in images, and they are the ones that he prefers—because he possesses all the necessary resources for painting them. An antithetical effect is provided for him right from the start: on one hand, poverty, and on the other, riches. He realizes this opposition through harmonic contrasts as the voices rise successively in a beseeching manner. In place of seeking to suggest the abstract idea of poverty, he represents the lamenting poor for us, each one moaning more strongly than the other. Their groans that begin on the same low note clash painfully with each other. We might say that the soprano, striving to make her petition more urgent, wants to drown out the alto (ex. 8.12).

The image shows a musical score for Soprano and Alto. The Soprano part is on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Alto part is on a bass clef staff. Both parts begin on a low note and move in parallel motion, with the Soprano part generally higher in pitch. The lyrics are written below the staves.

Soprano Die Ar - - muth, so Gott auf sich nimmt,
This poverty, which God on himself takes,


Alto Die Ar - - muth, so Gott auf sich nimmt,
This poverty, which God on himself takes,

Ex. 8.12. *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*, BWV 91/5, mm. 5–7.

⁹⁶ BWV 3/5, mm. 1–20.

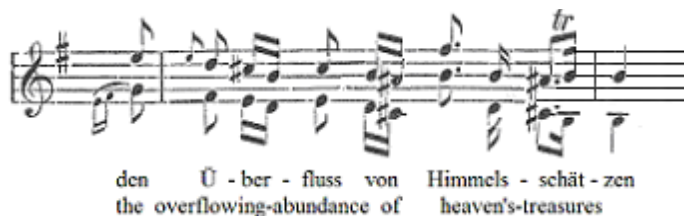
So the harsh dissonance produced by the collision of the C with the B is both graphic and expressive—a bitter figure of poverty, in which one remembers the collective lament of a group of beggars.

In contrast, after this sorrowful entrance Bach interprets words that promise “eternal salvation” (ex. 8.13a) and “the abundance of heaven’s treasures” (ex. 8.13b) with supple-rhythmed motifs that closely agree with each other.



Hat uns ein e - wig Heil (bestimmt)
Has for us an eternal salvation (appointed)
(Has appointed for us an eternal salvation)

Ex. 8.13a. *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*, BWV 91/5, mm. 10–11.



den Ü - ber - fluss von Himmels - schät - zen
the overflowing-abundance of heaven's-treasures

Ex. 8.13b. *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*, BWV 91/5, mm. 13–15.

Lastly, the meaning of the instrumental motif stated in the introduction that is repeated throughout the piece is explained to us by the text in the second part of the aria: “His mortal nature makes you equal with the splendor of angels, to place you in the angels’ choir.” We understand then the orchestral pattern and the two symbols that it declares through its double structure: the idea of lowering God to the human state, and the idea of man’s transfiguration through grace that likens him to angels. The first measure of the violin theme has a falling melodic line, and in the second bar it rises, giving the whole phrase a rhythm that tempers majesty with grace. And it is important to point out that the thirty-second note following the dotted sixteenth-note here must not be played too rigorously—as we know through Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach, who wrote that these note values are not always strict.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ “The sixteenth-note must sometimes be considered as equal to the third eighth-note of a triplet, of which the first two are tied (♩♩♩).” (C. P. E. Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* [Leipzig: 1787] 3rd ed., 1:98.) It seems that we could apply this precept here, since triplets do not occur in this duet, but the motif has a soaring character rather than a hammered-out one.

Played in this way, the motif softens and hovers more gently, and while maintaining a far-away solemnity, it participates in these arabesques with which Bach represents the angels' hovering in space.⁹⁸ In this part of the aria, this theme also appears in the basso continuo, and the singers state the ascending chromatic theme that we have already noted as being coupled with words of redemption.⁹⁹ In this passage, Bach combines several allegorical resources whose interpretation is certain. But he only uses the ascending chromatic theme for joining with the words recalling the Savior's sorrowful pilgrimage among men, while the angels' noble theme floats in its sweet simplicity above the entire composition. Here is how it is stated in the introduction (ex. 8.14).



Ex. 8.14. *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*, BWV 91/5, mm. 1–5.

Even more so than in the duet I cited above, the orchestra here has an obstinate uniformity. The solo voices sing diversely according to the words that they are expressing, but they resemble each other in their melodic lines, through which they either mirror each other or strictly agree.¹⁰⁰

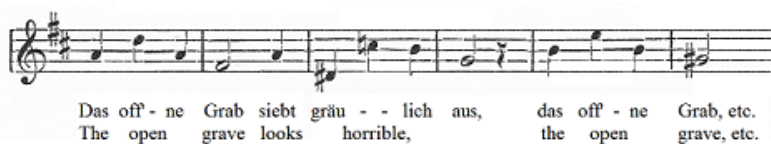
On the other hand, the unity of the instrumental accompaniment assures the formal unity of the tenor and alto duet in the cantata *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*. Both voices remain independent from each other, and, considered separately, the two melodies that they sing are free in structure and are uniquely modeled according to the clauses of the text. This duo is, in fact, a lyrical scene for two characters, rather than a duet of the customary sort. In this cantata a dream world is revived that was already employed by the first composers who either heralded the “oratorio style” from a distance or tried their hand at it. As in Valerio da Bologna’s *Commedia spirituale dell’Anima* (1575) and Emilio del Cavalliere’s *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo* (1600), we see Bach personifying the feelings of fear and hope. The alto (Fear) is given only falling motifs to express the fright that death inspires in her or where her faith wavers, and her singing is full of altered intervals: the very words designating “the open tomb” rise with a menacing

⁹⁸ See the aria “Bleibt ihr Engel” (cantata *Es erhub sich ein Streit*, BWV 19/5, mm. 1–12 et seq.).

⁹⁹ See exs. 2.59a, b, and preceding text.

¹⁰⁰ BWV 91/5, mm. 1–15 et seq.

energy, and the phrase is repeated a second time a step higher to show the increase in horror at the sight of the sepulcher (ex. 8.15).



Ex. 8.15. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*, BWV 60/3, mm. 65–70.

The alto does not even conclude her phrase—her voice remaining suspended as if the terrifying vision suddenly sweeps away her power to speak.

On the contrary, the tenor (Hope) expands easily. Confidence overflows in these climbing progressions that enthusiastically unfold: “The Savior’s hand will cover me . . . My Jesus helps me bear this burden” (ex. 8.16).



Ex. 8.16. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*, BWV 60/3, mm. 22–29.

He pours out his heart in joyous melismas, and he responds to the alto’s terrified exaltation with enraptured exaltation. For him, the grave is not a frightful abode, but a “house of peace” (ex. 8.17).



Ex. 8.17. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*, BWV 60/3, mm. 68–72.

And he concludes with a great streak of jubilation.

The orchestra reflects the characters of these two different inspirations. The oboe d'amore has the same jerky moan and the same drops as the alto, and the solo violin proclaims the infinite serenity of the tenor. And when the violin's even scales descend, they seem to bring a message of benediction from heaven. When they rise, they seem to precede the soul's soaring toward God. It is an exchange of glances and beams and a stream of graces and prayers (ex. 8.18).



Ex. 8.18. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! II*, BWV 60/3, mm. 1–5.

Individuality of Themes in Different Voices

In a cantata for the celebration of Easter—which Spitta believes to be Bach's first cantata¹⁰¹—we already find a duet whose construction establishes his precocious ability to oppose two themes against each other in the two voices. He puts into practice there this species of musical antithesis from the first years of the 18th century that, in *Critischer Musikus* of 1745, Scheibe appreciates thus: "This form ('antithesis') must contribute, for the greatest part, to the expression of vocal pieces that contain different feelings, and it is in these pieces that it is the most useful. In works for stage or other dramatic compositions, we often find some duets—or arias for two voices—in which each voice speaks according to a passion that is particular to it and is opposite to what the other voice interprets. We can never express feelings properly and with naturalness if we do not possess enough skill to link together two opposing melodic lines and merge them within a single harmony. We immediately see here that a composer will not succeed in the theatre if he does not understand double counterpoint perfectly, for it is the foundation of this musical contrast . . ." ¹⁰² In this first work for the church, undoubtedly written in 1704, Bach negotiates with admirable ease this polyphonic resource that Scheibe considers indispensable to the theatre composer. But, whereas the voices maneuver with a wonderful independence in the duet from the cantata *O Ewigkeit, du*

¹⁰¹ [This cantata was composed by Johann Ludwig Bach according to Unger, *Handbook*, 51.—Trans.]

¹⁰² Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus*, 694.

Donnerwort II, the performers here are bound to a strict form. The phrases pass from one voice to the other and correspond directly with each other, and the orchestra has no motifs of its own. In the introduction, the first and second violins foretell what the voices will sing: the bright and lively theme of joyfulness, and the characteristic theme of sorrow. Here is the opening of this duet (ex. 8.19):

Ich jauch - - ze, ich la - - che, ich jauch - - ze mit Schall, ihr kla - get, etc.
I shout, I laugh, I rejoice loudly, she laments, etc.

Ihr klaget mit Seuf - - zen, ihr wei - - net, ich jauch - - ze
she laments with a sigh, she weeps, I shout

Ex. 8.19. *Denn du wirst meine Seele nicht in der Hölle lassen*, BWV 15/7, mm. 12–15.

The trio found in the fifth cantata of the *Christmas Oratorio* is again conceived according to the same plan as the duets in which Bach gives expression to opposite feelings through diverse voices. The tenor and soprano form only a single group, so to speak, in which they utter the same ideas and state the same motifs, developing them into analogous pictures. They sigh toward the unknown time when the Comforter will appear. The alto responds to them “Hush, He is already here!” But she only enters to conclude the phrases left in suspense by the other two voices’ questioning, and amidst their moans and doubts she shows herself as a messenger of certainty. A tender and luminous violin solo envelops this entire scene by symbolizing the merciful presence—both ignored and desired—that the alto wants to reveal.¹⁰³

* * *

Fugue, a Lyrical Form

We must finish this hasty examination of the principal forms used by Bach, in so far as they are expressive forms, by pointing out the meaning of the strictly musical forms—those that are the most severe and that appear the most artificial and most devoid of symbolic value or suggestive power.

I have already pointed out several examples of the metaphoric use of the canon—the musical process that consists of accompanying a given melody with

¹⁰³ BWV 248/21, mm. 21–40 et seq.

other statements playing that same melody that begin on different beats and at intervals decided upon in advance. From this constraint, we have seen that Bach has extracted images of obligation or that he has interpreted—through this organized sequence of identical motifs—ideas of consecutive striding. Therefore, in the cantata *Ich elender Mensch*,¹⁰⁴ the trumpet and oboes reflect fragments of the chorale *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut* (Lord Jesus Christ, thou highest good). The entire first chorus is dominated by this doubly allegorical figure, and the voices sing “I, wretched man, who will deliver me from the body of this death?” The vigorous chain of phrases from the hymn, presented in canon, awakens ideas of subjection and absolute dependence. But under the weight of captivity, the Christian preserves hope in his deliverer. In fact, the chorale melody evokes the memory of absent words, but ones known by each of the faithful: “Lord, Jesus Christ, thou highest good, thou wellspring of all grace, see how in my heart I am laden with sorrows.” At the beginning of the cantata *Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen* (They will all come out of Sheba)¹⁰⁵ the canonic entrances of the orchestra and voices, very close together, represent “the hurried masses who direct themselves toward the Savior to pay him homage, offer him gold and incense, and shout His praises.”¹⁰⁶

For Bach, even the fugue is an ingenious way of speaking to our imagination. The soprano aria that opens the cantata for Trinity, *O heiliges Geist- und Wasserbad* (O sacred Spirit- and water-bath),¹⁰⁷ unfolds in fugal form, and the voice is carried along in this current—floating, as it were, amidst a surge of even and identical waves that represent the “sacred spirit- and water-bath, which puts God’s kingdom within us.” The vocal line, which is mixed with the active instrumental harmony, participates in the motion of the waves as if interlaced with them. For making this comparison possible, the music also interprets, in a fortunate correspondence, the second clause of the text in which Salomon Franck¹⁰⁸ says that baptism inscribes us in the book of life. In the cantata *Wahrlich, wahrlich, ich sage euch* Bach refrains from his custom of having the Evangelist sing in arioso form the words “Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall request something of the Father in my name, then he will give it to you.” Instead, he adds the vocal melody to a four-part fugue that is stated and developed by the strings, thereby avoiding the use of a theatrical form to express Jesus’s words. At the same time, through the fugue’s regularity—whose well-determined course foresees a sure conclusion—he predicts the realization of Christ’s promise that will be fulfilled just as surely as the fugue is deployed with complete precision and mathematical steadfastness.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ BWV 48/1, mm. 14–20 et seq.

¹⁰⁵ BWV 65/1, mm. 1–9.

¹⁰⁶ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:217.

¹⁰⁷ BWV 165/1, mm. 1–11 et seq.

¹⁰⁸ The poem of this cantata is published in Franck’s *Evangelisches Andachts-Opffer* (1715).

¹⁰⁹ BWV 86/1, mm. 1–24 et seq.

These examples show us at what point Bach assimilated the fugue's resources into his work—since he used them spontaneously and not as an abstract form invented for mere compositional reasons, but as a living form with a more strictly written language, and one in which the mechanics of the style have not excluded the thoughts. Bach's fugues are, in fact, rich with thoughts and feelings, and we only have to reflect on their themes to be convinced that he never composes fugues in the cantatas just to demonstrate his ability to lay out decorative arabesques in large strokes that are subtly knit together. But he first strives to render, in the subject, the profound meaning of the words that he is given. And the very amplitude of the form not only gives him a marvelous power to extract from the text these partial images in which the throng agitates his works so violently and convulses them like tragedies, but the fullness of the fugue also makes him the master of yet another power: he finds in it the lyrical energy particular to broadly cadenced poems, and the returns of the theme divide the fugue into equally measured stanzas in which the continual balancing of similar rhythms lull the listener and gradually entrance him with its rocking motion.¹¹⁰ We await the repeats of the principal motif, and each time one of the voices announces or resumes it, it resounds with more vigor—for it is enriched by all that our memory has retained of it and by all that our imagination has attributed to it. In the midst of the developments, it emerges ever more characteristic, ever more willful, better known, and, consequently, better understood. The least expressive theme repeated in this way takes on a unique intensity.

In a cantata from Bach's youth, *Aus der Tiefen*, written in 1707, the last chorus ends with a fugue composed on the words "And he will redeem Israel from all its sins." The instruments also take part in it, prolonging the lyrical soaring of the voices.¹¹¹ The cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, from 1714, also ends with a fugal chorus in which a rapturous storm is unleashed. The orchestra intervenes with splendor, and, after the exposition sung by the four vocal parts, three trumpets take up the theme, in imitation, with the solo bass, who sings the Apocalyptic words "Laud and honor and praise and might to our God from eternity to eternity." At the same time, the other parts sing the "amen" or shout out the triumphant "hallelujah" like a fanfare.¹¹² These pages contain an intense joy and a tremendous mystical exaltation. But these sublime flights are characteristic only of Bach. He alone can attain rapture through such means, which contemporaries of his earlier works use awkwardly and dryly. In part three of Friedrich Erhardt Niedt's treatise on music, he condemns all fugues written on "Amen, Halleluja," etc. "that resemble bursts of

¹¹⁰¹¹⁰ Lecerc de la Viéville already relishes this great unity: "The fugues are pleasing to the ear, in that one likes to hear a single melodic line diversified and treated on all chords" (*Comparaison de la Musique*, pt. 3, 141).

¹¹¹ BWV 131/5, mm. 6–15 et seq.

¹¹² BWV 21/11, mm. 12–31 et seq.

laughter and a farcical game, and that are generally received in church with boredom and distaste by the congregation.”¹¹³

¹¹³ Niedt, *Musicalischer Handleitung, dritter letzter Theil*, 37. This work was published by Mattheson after the author's death. Chabanon speaks of the fugue with contempt in his book *De la musique considerée en elle-même*, etc. (1785), 115.

CHAPTER NINE

COMPOSITIONS JOINED, SUCCESSIVELY, TO TEXTS OF DIFFERENT NATURES

Bach's adaptations are not made without respect to the meaning of the words. – German works relate directly to the Latin works. – How a secular work can be transformed into a sacred work.

Bach's Adaptations Are Not Made Without Respect to the Meaning of the Words

In quite a few of his works, Bach has not invented, but adapted. He has re-clothed certain texts with music he previously composed for other texts, and there are pieces that he has renewed, or simply repeated, even when the subject of the poetry seemed very different from the subject he had dealt with earlier. Considering that the same music could suit lyrics with different meanings, it would have been quite pointless to have attempted up to this point to show that Bach was constantly guided in his inspiration by the words that were provided for him if we hadn't also shown that, in many cases, he took into account not just the words but also the feelings that he strove to interpret as well. Therefore, examining the works in which he doesn't create a new motif or theme, but restates one he has used before, most often demonstrates the discernment that he has used in carrying over his music from one text to another. We soon recognize that there is something in common between the ideas contained in the different word phrases that he expresses with the same notes, and we discover in them some parallel images,

connections, and related settings. In comparing these similar works, we learn what Bach's general intention and the substance of his thought is in each of them. We perceive what he feels strongest about in certain lyrics and what he wants to extract from them without being held up by minor interpretive details.

German Works Relate Directly to the Latin Works

First of all, we should note that some of these adaptations are extremely natural. For example, it is not surprising that in the *Mass in B Minor*, for the "Gratias, agimus tibi, propter magnam gloriam tuam" (We give thanks to thee for thy great glory),¹ Bach employs a chorus whose German text has almost exactly the same meaning: "Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir, und verkündigen deine Wunder" (We thank thee O God, we thank thee and proclaim thy wonders).² In the same mass, the chorus "Qui tollis peccata mundi, Miserere nobis" (Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us),³ is a reworking of the first chorus from the cantata *Schauet doch und sehet, ob irgendein Schmerz sei, wie mein Schmerz* (Behold, indeed, and see, if there be any grief like my grief).⁴ Here, in contrast to the first example, the two texts are no longer so nearly identical, but we can see that they are very directly related—one being a lament, the other a supplication—and they both refer to Jesus sacrificed. The words of the first chorus from the cantata *Weinen, Klagen* are "Weeping, wailing, worrying, fearing, anguish and need are the 'bread of tears' of Christians who bear the sign of Jesus,"⁵ and the music from this chorus becomes the "Crucifixus" in the *Mass in B Minor*.⁶ Here again, the relationship of meanings is clear, since the German text also clearly evokes the idea of the cross. Furthermore, this music is based on a characteristic pain motif—a motif that Bach frequently joins to words that recall Christ's death.⁷ The "Patrem omnipotentem" (Father Almighty)⁸ comes from the first chorus in the cantata *Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm*,⁹ and in both cases, what the music celebrates is God's greatness. The "Agnus Dei" (O Lamb of God) is fashioned after the alto aria from the cantata *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*:¹⁰ the vocal melody is transformed, but the accompaniment displays the same urgent prayer in both pieces. We see, then, that these transcriptions are not strict. Spitta

¹ BWV 232/7, mm. 1–14 et seq.

² BWV 29/2, mm. 1–14, et seq.

³ BWV 232/9, mm. 1–14 et seq.

⁴ BWV 46/1, mm. 17–24 et seq.

⁵ BWV 12/2, mm. 1–14, et seq.

⁶ BWV 232/17, mm. 5–18 et seq.

⁷ See the interpretations of the chromatic motifs (chap. 2 of this volume).

⁸ BWV 232/14, mm. 1–12 et seq.

⁹ BWV 171/1, mm. 1–12 et seq.

¹⁰ BWV 11/4, mm. 1–25 et seq.

already pointed this out: “Bach never leaves any of his compositions absolutely as they are in their first version, even when they have not completely changed appearance. Often, by adding some small touches, they have become even more characteristic—as have the ‘Crucifixus,’ through the quivering in the bass and the final modulation,¹¹ and the ‘Qui tollis’ (who takes away), through the reduction in sound that Bach obtains by deleting the woodwinds.”¹²

Other transcriptions are less successful, even though Bach still uses great ingenuity in them. Spitta regrets that in the “Gloria” from the *Mass in G Major*¹³ Bach destroyed the superb arrangement of the original work—the first chorus from the cantata *Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild*,¹⁴ but I won’t try to defend Bach against Spitta here.¹⁵ Not only has the structure of this chorus been ruined, but the sonority has been spoiled right down to the arrangement of the voices. However, as to its most meaningful components, we must admit that Bach has proceeded with rare wisdom. Certainly, he has destroyed a very beautiful structure, but he has tried very hard to adapt everything in it to the new site he chose for its re-building. We cannot insist too much on this point: Bach, the master of form, actually diminishes the form here. The first chorus from the cantata has admirable proportions: the voices and the orchestra alternate with each other, respond to each other, and unite with perfect craft. It is this wonder of a plan that he overturns, this astonishing balance that he upsets, and this beautiful progression of musical speech that he disrupts as a result of this conversion. But on the other hand, in the “Gloria,” he has brought out some figures and some allusions that give the music a sort of profound picturesqueness, and he contents himself with this new work, in which he revives, through traces of the earlier one, all the grandeur that is enriched by a great many images. On the cantata manuscript he wrote the words “God the Lord is sun and shield. The Lord gives grace and honor, he will not let the righteous lack any good thing.” Spitta assumes that this work was composed for the Reformation celebration of 1735, and in his biography he notes a passage that recalls the war that could threaten Saxony, since it was being fought for the cause of Polish succession and pursued on the Rhine and in Italy.¹⁶ The orchestral accompaniment to this chorus has the rhythm and sonority of a military march, and from the start of the introduction, two horns state a motif of martial character (ex. 9.1) while the tympani maintains a continuous roll (ex. 9.1).¹⁷

¹¹ BWV 236/2, mm. 1–13 et seq.

¹² Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:527.

¹³ BWV 232, p. 162.

¹⁴ BWV 79/1, mm. 1–13 et seq.

¹⁵ See vol. 2 of the admirable work by Spitta—erudite and inspired commentator—dedicated to the cantor (*J. S. Bach*, 2:511).

¹⁶ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:553.

¹⁷ See in *Monatshefte für Musikwissenschaft* (1875), 7:151 a military march from the 18th century (*Marsch eines sächsischen Dragonerregimentes vom Jahre 1729*). This piece, in G, is orchestrated with oboes and horns in two parts and bassoon.



Ex. 9.1. *Gott der Herr ist Sonn' und Schild*, BWV 79/1, mm. 1–6.

This vigorous and extremely rhythmic entrance is followed by a three-part fugal episode. The first violins and the oboe emit a daring, quivering motif that raises itself like a volley of arrows and ends with some decisive arpeggios and powerful held notes. This theme is certainly descriptive, and the interpretation that I am offering of it surely must be accurate. In the alto aria of this cantata, it is a question of “arrows sharpened by the enemy,” and the music is easy to interpret precisely. The repeated notes that appear first depict the vibration of the bowstring (the image is already found in Tunder¹⁸). Then the motif's ascending momentum makes us think of the flight of a feathered arrow, and in the last measures we find some battle figures that Bach frequently uses.¹⁹ Lastly, the held note on the tonic seems to show that the arrowhead has struck its target and is steadfastly fixed (ex. 9.2).



Ex. 9.2. *Gott der Herr ist Sonn' und Schild*, BWV 79/1, mm. 13–20.

Before the introduction ends, the horns resume their war chant that is combined with agitated figures in the rest of the orchestra, and the tympani add their regular beating to this tumult of the melee in which we already hear the song of victory.

The chorus bursts forth on the last chord of the introduction, and while the magnificently spaced voices praise God who protects his own, the strings, united on the violin's low G, repeat, darkened, the motif from the fugal episode; so, on one hand, Bach evokes shelter and protection, and on the other, combat.

In Bach's Latin adaptation, the instrumental coloring is not the same. The horns and the tympani are discarded, and only two oboes and the strings make up the orchestra so that the introduction then partially loses the appearance of a battle

¹⁸ Franz Tunder, *Gesangwerke*, (ps. *Nisi Dominus*), *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, ed. Seiffert (1900), series 1, 4:37

¹⁹ See chap. 5 of this book.

scene that had such a powerful effect in the cantata for the Reformation celebration. Nevertheless, Bach does not renounce the descriptive virtue of its music, and from the first measure of the Mass the sopranos and altos sing the words “Gloria in excelsis Deo” (Glory be to God on high) on the motifs originally entrusted to the horns in the cantata. Then, as in the cantata version, the instruments begin a fugue after this phrase, and the two upper vocal parts, surrounded by a forceful orchestra, present anew the initial theme that the horns brought in at the end of the cantata. The entire chorus then sings the words “Et in terra pax” (And on earth peace). Of course, Bach appeals to the meaning of the quiet chords that the singers unfold with the organ, and after the agitation of the fugal development these somber harmonies have the value of a striking antithesis. They come after the warlike images, and we understand that Bach intends them to announce peace. Further on in the cantata chorus, the vocal line joined to the words “den Frommen” (with the devout) fits perfectly, in terms of its meaning, with the words “glorificamus te” (we glorify thee), whose equivalents are often translated by lyrical vocal phrases.

Where the original cantata pales and declines, we can see that the “Gloria” maintains a great symbolic richness, and it is important to realize that in order to reveal this richness Bach hasn’t hesitated to dismantle the first work with an incomparable symmetry and logic.

It is also for the sake of these contrasting effects that he chose the first chorus from the cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*²⁰ and the bass solo with chorus from the cantata *Halt im Gedächtnis*²¹ to create some of the choruses in the “Gloria in excelsis.” I have already pointed out,²² in the cantata *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*, the pause in motion in the middle of the first chorus when it comes to the words “God’s will shall quieten me.” This passage applies very well to the “et in terra pax” in the “Gloria” from the *Mass in G Minor*, in which the melismas from the beginning, organized in canonic form, correspond quite precisely with the perpetual praise sung before God by the blessed souls.²³ The use of a fragment from the cantata *Halt im Gedächtnis* in the “Gloria” from the *Mass in A Major*²⁴ justifies itself perfectly. In the cantata, the instruments play a turbulent introduction in which the arpeggiated motifs of the struggle agitate, interspersed with impetuous scales. The rhythm calms down, the orchestration changes, and the bass solemnly declaims “Peace be with you.” Then the movement revives when the three upper voices cry “How blessed are we! Jesus helps us to do battle.” This rhythmic alternation and these changes of sonority have suggested to Bach the use of this chorus for singing, successively, the glory of the Lord of hosts and the peace promised to men. The four voices strike up the “Gloria” from the beginning of the

²⁰ BWV 72/1, mm. 1–18 et seq.

²¹ BWV 67/6, mm. 1–13 et seq.

²² See p. 193.

²³ BWV 235/2, mm. 45–60.

²⁴ BWV 234/2, mm. 1–9.

introduction played by the strings in a rapid tempo (“vivace”), and then the flutes, alone with the basso continuo, accompany the alto, for whom the bass solo from the cantata is transposed, sung “adagio,” and adapted to the words “Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis” (And on earth peace to men of good will). The rest of the arrangement is less agreeable, in spite of the technical ability that Bach demonstrates. But I would only like to establish that he had tried to transform this cantata aria with chorus into the “Gloria” because of the connections he had recognized between the two texts. And he is content to show—through the different rhythms—the opposition between the two ideas that seem to him the most important and the easiest to distinguish through the music in the first part of the *Gloria*: the idea of the glorification of God through the boundless hymn of angels, and the idea of peace proclaimed to men. The procedure is familiar to him, and in the *Christmas Oratorio* he renders—almost as in these masses—the words “Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe, und Friede auf Erden” (Glory be to God in the highest and peace on earth).²⁵ The beginning of the chorus has momentum and breadth, but the voices slow down and the basses throb softly on repeated notes in the second statement.²⁶ Johann Kuhnau proceeds in the same way in his Christmas cantata *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her* (From high heaven I come). The “Gloria in excelsis” is sung there on a bright motif that ends with a descending *melsisma*: but, to interpret “et in terra pax,” he calms down the motion, groups the voices in low chords, and instructs the orchestra to play “piano.”²⁷

We also find several examples of different texts applied successively, in the same work, to the same music. In the cantata *Uns ist ein Kind geboren* (Unto us a child born),²⁸ the alto repeats, on other words, the aria that the tenor is going to sing. But here, we are in the presence of an aria with several verses. And in addition we note that the principal phrase has nearly the same meaning in the two couplets, whose general character is similar as well.²⁹

In the choruses from the *St. John Passion*, Bach takes up pretty much the same music again to accompany words of very diverse meanings. Thus, he applies analogous motifs to the words: “If he were not a criminal, we would not have condemned him”³⁰ and “We dare not put anyone to death.”³¹ In the same way, he expresses “Greetings, dear king of Jews”³² and “Write not, ‘King of the Jews,’ but

²⁵ BWV 248/21, mm. 1–9 et seq.

²⁶ BWV 248/21, mm. 26–31.

²⁷ Library of the city of Leipzig, 124.

²⁸ [According to Unger, this cantata was not composed by Bach, but perhaps by Johann Kuhnau. *Handbook*, 490.—Trans.]

²⁹ BWV 142/5, mm. 6–11; 142/7, mm. 6–10. The tenor says “Jesus, thanks is sung to you, to your honor and glory. . . .” The alto repeats “Jesus, praise be sung unto you”

³⁰ BWV 245/16b, mm. 1–14

³¹ BWV 245/16d, mm. 1–16.

³² BWV 245/21b, mm. 1–12.

that he has said, 'I am king of the Jews.'"³³ The theme from the fugal chorus "If thou lettest this man go, thou art not the emperor's friend"³⁴ is fashioned out of the chorus's theme "We have a law, and, according to the law, he must die."³⁵ Lastly, the response of the priests and pharisees' servants to Jesus: ("Whom do you seek?" he asks. "Jesus of Nazareth!" they reply);³⁶ the condemning of Christ by the people ("Not this man, but Barrabas!");³⁷ and the priests' phrase that precedes the sentencing pronounced by Pilate ("Shall I crucify your king?" he asks. "We have no king but the emperor," they reply.)³⁸—these are all of the same musical design and the same harmonic material, being joined with an orchestral accompaniment that is repeated in its entirety on each of the reprises. We are justified in immediately rejecting the opinion that Bach has reproduced the same music in these three cases simply in order to compose his work faster.³⁹ The time that he saved would have been quite minimal because each of the three choruses is formed from only four measures; and when we consider his facility, it also keeps us from holding such an opinion. Furthermore, if his intention had been to hasten the preparation of his material, he undoubtedly would have left the three choruses in the same key so that the orchestra could play the passage from the same copies. It would have been enough for him to change the ending of the recitatives surrounding these choruses in order to link them with more compatible keys. But his intent is quite the opposite, and he does not dream of diminishing anything in the choruses: these duplications are profoundly calculated. We should also note that the choruses are joined with three main dramatic scenes from the Passion: Jesus's arrest, his condemnation by the people, and his condemnation by the princes and priests. The orchestral motif in these pages is, in a certain sense, the "Leitmotif" of man's hate for the unknown Messiah, and we must not forget that this motif is of the same nature as the one played by the violino concertante (or flauto traverso) and the flauto piccolo in the first chorus of the cantata *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen*⁴⁰ to symbolize the world's wicked pleasure while the faithful lament. In the later cantata and in the Passion, the instruments have the same even agitation, the same arpeggios, and, we might say, the same sharp sneer.⁴¹ In having these few orchestral measures reappear at each decisive phase of the action, Bach

³³ BWV 245/25b, mm. 1–12.

³⁴ BWV 245/27b, mm. 1–15.

³⁵ BWV 245/21f, mm. 1–15.

³⁶ BWV 245/2c, mm. 16–17; /2d, mm. 1–4.

³⁷ BWV 245/18b, mm. 1–4.

³⁸ BWV 245/23e, mm. 2–3; /23f, mm. 1–4.

³⁹ I regret to have met this opinion in the fine book that Albert Schweitzer has devoted to Bach: *J. S. Bach, le Musicien-Poète* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1905), 253.

⁴⁰ BWV 103/1, mm. 1–10 et seq.

⁴¹ In particular, note the flute.

seems to want to say that the Savior—immolated for the sake of humanity's sins—is condemned, mocked, and disdained by men insensitive to his punishment.⁴²

In the other choruses from the *St. John Passion*, Bach makes use of the same motifs to depict the crowd's obstinacy, its blindness, its thoughtless judgments, and its senseless outcries.

* * *

How a Secular Work Can Be Transformed into a Sacred Work

We need to focus specifically at this point on a certain category of compositions that Bach adapted to texts with different contents: the portions of secular cantatas that he has used in the sacred works. Some people have claimed that if he did so it was because he was not really so interested in seeking "true expression,"⁴³ but they have not tried to find out what he wanted to interpret with these diverse texts, what he found in common among them, and what he knowingly neglected to transfer from one to the other. Moreover, these critics have attributed too much importance to the distinction that we are used to making between religious and secular art, but we must not forget that in Bach's time the church cantatas were considered to be pieces of Christian opera performed without staging.⁴⁴ Also, in those days the melodies borrowed from popular songs were quite readily incorporated into the hymnals.⁴⁵ We must also add that Bach's inspiration is essentially religious, and even when composing for a secular performance he maintains a dignified style and speaks with just as deep a sincerity as in his sacred works.

If we study these transcriptions closely, we recognize that in the adapted work Bach safeguards not only the dominant character of the original work but also the most important musical images that he used there. In certain cases, it is obvious that he recasts the poem so that the destination of the general effect can be changed


⁴² It is useful to note that in the chorale following the first of these choruses we find the words "I lived with the world of pleasure and joy, and you must suffer!"

⁴³ Johannes Weber, *Illusions musicales* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1883), 189.

⁴⁴ See the treatise on poetry published by Christian Friedrich Hunold, *Die allerneuste Art . . .* (Hamburg: 1712), 285.

⁴⁵ We read in the preface to the *Gothaisches Gebeth- und Gesang-Buch* (1721): "I would like, in ending, to say that I think of a frequently upsetting and controversial question of our day: if it is proper to adapt hymns to secular melodies? To this I say yes. For the secular melodies are written in the most gracious and lively way, and the spiritual texts that we adapt to them will only be more moving and penetrating. Besides, very few of the faithful know the origin of these melodies, and they sing such hymns very devotedly without thinking of evil." For showing that this practice is ancient, the author of the preface cites a passage from the Coburg song-book of 1621 in support of what he says.

without seriously disturbing the connection established between the music and the original text. The general feeling remains the same, and the details are modified with such ingenuity that the expressive figures either survive or are replaced by equivalent ones.

In the *Christmas Oratorio* Bach abundantly demonstrates his ability to metamorphose a composition based on the connections of the music and the text without completely destroying its meaning. A great many parts of this oratorio—which celebrates the Son of God's birth—are drawn from cantatas he originally wrote to honor members of the Saxon royal family. The first chorus, borrowed from the cantata *Tönet ihr Pauken, erschallet, Trompeten*,⁴⁶ had been composed on the words "Resound, drums, ring out trumpets! Sonorous strings, fill the air! Sing now, joyous poets and harmonious strings, fill the air." The orchestra for this chorus, as I have already pointed out, exemplifies the words⁴⁷—and it is the orchestra of brilliant compositions in which the splendor of royal feasts is shown at the same time as the people's joy. This chorus was originally written to celebrate the birthday of the Queen of Poland, electrice of Saxony (8 December 1733), and in the *Christmas Oratorio*, it glorifies the birth of the Messiah: "Give cries of joy, proclaim what the Highest brings to pass today . . ." The feeling is the same in both cases. In composing his chorus of congratulation for the queen, Bach wanted the music to overflow with joy; so its motifs are clear and vigorous, and its jubilant rhythmic patterns have a stirring energy ()⁴⁸—showing that he has put the full force of his enthusiasm into it. Then, to depict the exaltation of the believers who sing of the Messiah's coming, he only had to re-use this music in which he had fully expressed the most intense joy. That the subject is different doesn't worry him in the least. He has described an intense feeling the first time, and it seems very legitimate to him to reproduce anew the painting that he had already created in order to represent the same movement of the soul. For he never asks himself the exact cause of what has erupted in this tumult of feeling—or maybe he even intentionally refused to take it into account, knowing well that strong emotions manifest themselves in similar ways without our being able to recognize what has specifically aroused them.

Most of the arias or choruses in the *Christmas Oratorio* that come from secular cantatas also have clear links with the original arias or choruses. In the cantata for the queen, Bach interprets with a bass aria—in which a trumpet beams—these words of praise: "Crown and honor of ladies who wear the crown, O Queen, I make the universe resound with your name . . . That which is always virtuous that heroines alone possess, is for you an inborn gift."⁴⁹ In the *Christmas Oratorio*, this aria has for its text: "Powerful Lord, strong King, very dear Savior, how little you take from the earth's splendor: He who sustains the whole world,

⁴⁶ BWV 214, mm. 1–9 et seq.

⁴⁷ Spitta demonstrates that Bach is the author of these words (*J. S. Bach*, 2:461).

⁴⁸ See exs. 3.22a, b.

⁴⁹ BWV 214/6, mm. 15–42 et seq.

who has created its beauty, must sleep in a lowly cradle.”⁵⁰ The majesty and the magnificence of the music suit the two texts perfectly.

The lullaby that the Virgin sings beside the newborn child is drawn from a cantata composed for the anniversary of the crown prince of Saxony (5 September 1733). In this work—entitled *Dramma per musica: Hercules auf dem Scheidewege* (Hercules at the crossroads)—the character Wollust (Voluptuousness) beckons the young god to sleep: “Sleep, my darling, and take your rest. Follow the lure of burning thoughts”⁵¹ In the *Christmas Oratorio* we have the words “Sleep, my beloved. Enjoy your rest, after which you will awake to greet everyone”⁵² Gustave Engel claimed that the difference between the sleep of the sinless infant and the sleep to which Wollust invites the young hero is really too great for the music to reflect either of them.⁵³ But Bach has understood it otherwise; and even if, as we have just seen, he does not distinguish between different kinds of collective joy and blends all the degrees of majesty, he does not, however, treat the two lullabies—the Christian and the pagan—with the same colorings. The vocal line never varies, nor do the lines of the accompaniment, but in the Virgin’s aria the key is more serious: written first in the secular cantata for soprano in *B flat*, the melody is transposed in the oratorio to *G* for the alto. Furthermore, the orchestra for the alto aria becomes darker and more penetrating. Only strings accompany Wollust, while in the oratorio, the oboe d’amore and the oboe da caccia also play—one with the first violins and the other with the seconds—and the flute doubles the voice an octave higher. Surrounded in this way, the Virgin’s voice takes on the strange character of a supernatural sonority. In the interludes the two oboes actually unite to add a profound depth of expression to the orchestra’s syncopated phrase. The dissonant chords we hear in this aria portray a twinge of pain, while, in the secular one, they only reflect languor. Reworked in this way, of course, the original composition—which is above all an “aria of sleep” (shown clearly by the even oscillations of the bass line)⁵⁴—changes in character. The alto voice inflects it with a melancholy tenderness, and the instruments bewail ahead of time the sorrows which will be heaped upon the slumbering infant. The mother knows that her son was born to suffer pain upon waking to life.⁵⁵

The first chorus in the fourth cantata from the *Christmas Oratorio* is also drawn from the *Dramma per musica: Hercules auf Scheidewege*. The secular chorus begins with the words “Let us take care of and watch over our son, the son

⁵⁰ BWV 248/19, mm. 15–42 et seq.

⁵¹ BWV 213/32, mm. 28–40.

⁵² BWV 248/19, mm. 28–40 et seq.

⁵³ Engel, *Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (Berlin: 1884), 100.

⁵⁴ See ex. 5.26a, b.

⁵⁵ Jules Combarieu notes very rightly that the interpretation rendered by the performers must also contribute to differentiating the two arias. *Les Rapports de la Musique et de la Poésie* (Paris: 1893), 50.

of the gods. Our throne will become wonderful and known over all the earth,”⁵⁶ etc. The words in the oratorio are “Prostrate yourselves in thanksgiving; prostrate yourselves in praise before the Most-High’s throne of grace! God’s son will become the earth’s Savior and Redeemer,” etc. The similarity of feelings expressed by the two libretti—and the similarity of situations—are obvious. The division and stress of the verses and even the accented assonant vowels of the first poem have been carefully reproduced in the second.⁵⁷ Actually, the original text hardly needs to be recast. Change only a few words, and it applies to the celebration of Christmas. Change “son of the gods” to “son of God,” and the tribute intended for the young hero is transferred to the Christ child. And I could readily believe that Bach composed the first version as if the text were already substituted. Being accustomed to interpreting emotions in a religious context, living according to the Scripture, and remembering all the holy stories, he undoubtedly perceived initially how much the mythological and patriotic theme presented to him compared to the Christian one that he would need to work with later. Without fear of exaggerating very much, we might easily contend that it is the biblical theme—so close to his heart—that he dealt with in the context of the fable. Besides, what other grounds would he have for recognizing in the demi-god and the son of the Elector of Saxony an image of Jesus, son of the Most-High and hope of every Christian soul? The gifts that the Saxon people expected from the prince-elect would suggest to Bach the thought of the benefits of divine grace that the Messiah should bestow.⁵⁸ And, within the scope of the allegories, other images appear that are common to the superhuman characters portrayed in both the secular and sacred cantata. The alto aria in part one of the *Christmas Oratorio*⁵⁹ is indeed borrowed, like this chorus, from the cantata *Hercules und dem Scheidewege*,⁶⁰ and in the aria from the latter, Hercules rejects Wollust’s temptations and recalls that long ago he trampled the snakes that threatened him during his childhood sleep. Correspondingly, one of the epithets that is often attributed to Christ is “Schlangentreter” (one who tramples

⁵⁶ *Lasst uns sorgen, lasst uns wachen*
Ueber unsern Göttersohn.
Unser Thron wird auf Erden
Unser Thron wird aus ihm ein Wunder machen.

⁵⁷ *Fallt mit Danken, fallt mit Loben*
Vor des Höchsten Gnadenthron.
Gottes Sohn will der Erden
Heiland und Erlöser werden

Gottes Sohn dämpft der Feinde Wuth und Toben.

⁵⁸ Let us not forget that the sovereigns were the object of a kind of idolatry. It is the era when Mattheson wrote to Ernst Ludwig de Hasse “If God were not God, who, better than V.A.S. would deserve to be Him?”

⁵⁹ BWV 248/4.

⁶⁰ BWV 213/7.

on snakes)⁶¹: in the cantata *Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes*,⁶² the bass violently interjects the words “infernal serpent” and proclaims that whoever crushes its head shall be born again. All these small similarities have influenced Bach when he revived for the *Christmas Oratorio* so many parts of the *Dramma per musica* written in honor of the king’s son.

We do not find such multiple analogies among the ideas contained in the two versions of the “Echo Aria” that Bach revives in the oratorio. Here is what Hercules sings in the *Dramma*: “Faithful Echo of these parts, should I allow myself to be deceived by the words of sweet seduction? Give me your reply: No (no). Or else must the warning that so many labors were forthcoming mean that the way must be laid out for me instead? Ah! Say instead yes (yes).” This scene, where a character converses with an echo is entirely in the early 18th-century operatic style. For example, in a cantata entitled *Die verliebte Diana* (1698), Reinhard Keiser gracefully uses such far-off repetition effects.⁶³ And in the opera *Bellerophon*—whose text Hunold published in his treatise on poetry⁶⁴—Stenobaea, hidden behind a tree, pretends to be the echo by repeating the end of the phrases delivered by Acastus, who is wearing the same costume as Bellerophon. Another example of the echo—“a very agreeable resource, particularly in poems for the stage”—is included in the same work.⁶⁵ This same play of echoing was relished for a long time,⁶⁶ and it was favored everywhere. I also point out Pergolesi’s use of it in his *Maître de Musique* composed a few years before Bach’s *Dramma per musica*.

This play of words and notes, beloved in poetry for the stage, was also allowed in religious poetry. Philipp Spitta cites a “Liebesgesang” (love song) from Friedrich Spee’s *Trutznachtigal* (Rival of the nightingale), where Jesus’s bride converses with the forest echo: “‘Ah! Jesus,’ I sigh . . . And soon I hear . . . From the forest . . . Saying distinctly . . . ‘Ah! Jesus.’”⁶⁷ Salomon Franck—several of whose poems Bach set to music in cantata form—readily makes use of this echo

⁶¹ The image is often revived in the Scriptures (cf. 2 Cor. 3; Rev. 12:9, 20:2. See also the hymn by P. Gerhardt, *Schwingt dich auf*, and the second stanza of the hymn by Nicolaus Herman (c. 1500–1560) *Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag*.

⁶² BWV 40/4, mm. 17–32.

⁶³ The passage is cited in Robert Eitner’s *Monatshefte* (1884), 16th year, 31.

⁶⁴ Hunold, *Die allernueste Art*, 455.

⁶⁵ *Bellerophon*, p. 252 and 254.

⁶⁶ Mersenne cites an ingenious and bizarre application of echoing repeats in the ceremony performed in Tournon in 1610 at the “funeral honors” given for Henri IV. The echo of Greek syllables produced French words. *Harmonie universelle* (Paris: 1636), vol. 1, chap. 3 of the treatise on sound.

⁶⁷ See the modern edition of Spee’s *Trutz-nachtigall* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1889), 20. This collection of mystical poems was only published after the author’s death in 1749. Friedrich Spee succumbed to the stresses of his ministry in 1755, which he had carried out with an incomparable zeal and charity during the siege of Trier and the epidemic that immediately followed.

motif play. And in pointing out this use of the echo theme in religious poems, Spitta actually acknowledges once more that Bach, by recasting his secular compositions in a religious setting, has merely put them in their rightful place. If Bach needed another reason for doing so, I would still say that, while it is true that it is a rather commonplace resource, he uses the musical echo in these arias with a charming ingenuity. A second voice repeats the last words of the first, and the oboe restates those same notes again: it is a chain of diverse mirror reflections, and it is prolonged delightfully. In this aria, in which he so tenderly evokes Jesus's name, Bach reveals to us the scenery of an interior landscape that his soul has composed to enjoy—simultaneously—all the aspects it loves. We would not know how to explain this composition without imagining a setting in which nature, heart, and mind are communing. And we might be able to select it for representing that old German painting in which an unknown artist shows a monk in prayer, kneeling next to a spring that reflects the colors of his robe. The infant Jesus, held by his mother, appears from the foliage of the nearby forest, and we might say that He is responding to the holy man's prayers. Emblems are attached to the trees, and the green and bluish countryside lies in the distance.⁶⁸ The painting and the vocal work possess a similar ingenuity of thought and are equally charming. In one, as in the other, the sincerity of religious feeling makes us forget the childlike innocence behind their execution.⁶⁹

The tenor aria "Auf meinen Flügeln sollst du schweben" (On my wings you shall float), from the same *Dramma*, also occurs in the *Christmas Oratorio* where these words are applied to it: "I would only live for thy honor, my Savior; grant me strength and courage, so that my heart might do right zealously! Strengthen me to exalt thy grace worthily with thanksgiving!" The complete text of the aria in the *Dramma* is: "You must float on my wings, on them you will climb up to the stars like an eagle, and through me your radiance will rise to perfection." The music depicts the powerful soaring and the eagle's sustained flight (ex. 9.3).

⁶⁸ Louvre museum, No. 2738a. [According to Ryan Jensen of Art Resource, New York, this painting has been identified as "Madonna and Child with a Dominican Monk Offering His Heart," by Joos van Cleve (1485–1540), Louvre No. RF2068. The "emblems attached to the trees" seem to refer to "Arma Christi," a tradition in iconography, dating back to the 9th century, of representing the weapons Christ used to achieve his conquest over Satan.—Trans.]

⁶⁹ We can point out other echo effects in Bach's cantatas *Schwingt freudig euch empor* (BWV 36/5, mm. 4–8 et seq.), *Mit Fried und Freud* (BWV 125/4, mm. 50–56), and in the *Dramma per musica: Der zufriedengestellte Äolus* (BWV 205/12, mm. 44–47).

Auf mei - nen Flü - geln sollst du schwe - - - - -
 On my wings you shall float - - - - -
 (Ich will nur dir zu Eh - ren le - - - - -
 I will only for your honor live - - - - -

- - - - - ben
 - - - - - ben)

Ex. 9.3. *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege*, BWV 213/7, mm. 13–16;
 and *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/41, mm. 13–16.⁷⁰

In the second version, as we can see, the protagonist has disappeared, but we can say he remains implied. On one hand, Virtue promises Hercules to raise him up to the highest regions, and on the other, the faithful announces that he wishes to lead a noble and strong life dedicated to Jesus, and he undertakes to achieve through Christianity the ideal that Virtue has proposed to Hercules. When Bach wrote the aria for the *Dramma* he surely would have thought of the righteous man who, as we read in the holy scriptures, rises in virtue like an eagle⁷¹; so we should not be astonished to see him renew—in the oratorio—this aria in which we already find elements of a biblical metaphor.

The bass and soprano duet in the third *Christmas Oratorio* cantata⁷² accurately interprets the idea of consolation expressed by the singers. The music is again borrowed from *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege*⁷³ where it accompanies phrases of love in the betrothal of the hero and Virtue. If we look first at the words from the secular cantata we can be astonished at finding this joyful music linked to words in the oratorio where it is a matter of “pity and mercy.” However, we must note that it is not a question of tearful compassion but that the text celebrates the effects of God’s mercy, which “comforts us and makes us free.” And we should recall the intensity with which Bach feels and shows the joyfulness that God’s kindness brings him; so it is not odd that he uses these exultant themes here in the oratorio. Furthermore, a text that proclaims tenderness and fidelity in the second part of the aria corresponds in both libretti. Without being entirely parallel in every detail, the two poetic fragments are not opposed, and by interpreting them similarly, Bach has not created a conflict.

⁷⁰ Here, in the *Christmas Oratorio*, the aria is in D minor.

⁷¹ Isa. 40:31.

⁷² BWV 248/29, mm. 17–30 et seq.

⁷³ BWV 213/11, mm. 17–30 et seq.

* * *

Some fragments from several of Bach's lost works are preserved for us, since they have been incorporated into other compositions. For example, in the *St. Matthew Passion* we find the principal elements from which he formed the funeral cantata performed in honor of Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, who died 18 November 1728. The words of the cantata were adapted to some passages from the previously written Passion, and Bach secured from the poet a transformation of text that never compromises the expressive precision of the music too much. In the aria from the funeral cantata, the descending chromatic sequences—and further on, the intersected motifs—quite accurately agree with the words “Woe and alas, the soul suffers a thousand times.”⁷⁴ The new text in the Passion also agrees with the music in the second part of the aria, in which the descending instrumental arpeggios symbolize the dew from tears shed for Jesus's sake. An analogous image remains and is actually enlarged in the verse “And the eyes of true love are turbid like a clear stream after a storm.”⁷⁵ A supplicating aria in the cantata, inspired by Ezekiel's cry, corresponds to the alto aria from part two of the *St. Matthew Passion*: “Have mercy, my Lord.” In the Passion, the soprano sings “Out of love my Savior now is dying,” and in the funeral cantata we read “With joy, the world is left.”⁷⁶ In the two arias, the motif of repeated notes in the sixth measure of the vocal part is joined with a phrase that expresses an irrevocable decision. In the two works, the bass aria in the first part speaks of a sorrow mingled with consolation.

⁷⁴ *Johann Sebastian Bach's Werke*, ed. Bach-Gesellschaft, vol. 20², preface to pt. 2, x and xi.

⁷⁵ Here are the two texts:

(Passion)

*Buss und Reu' knirscht das Sündenherz entzwei
Dass die Tropfen meiner Zähren
Angenehme Spezerei
Treuer Jesu, dir gebähren.*

(Cantata)

*Weh' und Ach kränkt die Seelen tausendfach
Und die Augen treuer Liebe
Werden wie ein heller Bach
Bei entstand'nem Wetter trübe.*

76

(Passion)

*Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben,
Von einer Sünde weiss er nichts,
Dass das ewige Verderben
Und die Strafe des Gerichts
Nicht auf meiner Seele bliebe.*

(Cantata)

*Mit Freuden sei die Welt verlassen
Der Tod kommt mir recht tröstlich für,
Ich will meinen Gott umfassen:
Dieser hilft und bleibt bei mir
Wenn sich Geist und Glieder scheiden.*

In the tenor aria with chorus in both works, the ideas of sleep and death are interpreted with an equal precision by themes with a rocking rhythm that speaks to us of repose. The last bass aria in the Passion exudes a great feeling of peace common to each of the poems.

Lastly, in the final chorus of the funeral cantata, the text corresponds to the main musical figures first associated with the chorus from the Passion's "burial scene."⁷⁷

In 1731, at Saint Thomas Church on Good Friday, Bach performed a *Passion according to St. Mark* in which he used several parts from the *Trauer-Ode*⁷⁸ written in 1727 for Queen Christiane Eberhardine and for which Johann Christoph Gottsched composed the text. In the choruses and arias, Christian Friedrich Henrici,⁷⁹ author of the *St. Mark Passion* libretto, closely follows the poem from the *Trauer-Ode*. Although an able versifier, Henrici (Picander was his pen name) did not transpose Gottsched's words very scrupulously. He took care to maintain nearly the same rhythm and length without heeding the meaningful details of the music, and, according to Spitta, this work was probably performed without Bach conducting it.⁸⁰ The expressive motifs dearest to the composer do not, in fact, have more of a special relation with the words. Therefore, in the first chorus, the melodic line associated with the passage "and see, with what floods of tears" is disrupted by needless sobs when it accompanies words whose delivery happens to contain a positive meaning: "Thy consolation will shine again." In the aria from the Passion that corresponds to the *Trauer-Ode*'s soprano aria "Verstummt, ihr holden Saiten" (Be silent, ye charming lyres!), not only does the allusion in the accompanying instruments disappear, but the great moaning melisma sung on "O Schmerzenswort!" (O painful word!) is applied to "mein Heil" (my Savior). The long note that begins the second part of the *Trauer-Ode* is joined to the word "Ewigkeit" (eternity), but in Picander's transcription, this image no longer exists. However, the unison found in the final chorus retains the same character in the Passion as in the cantata. Originally intended to mark clearly the words that resume the praise of Christiane Eberhardine, these several measures—in which all the voices sing the same motif together—serve in the Passion for proclaiming the doctrine of salvation.⁸¹

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⁷⁷ I refer, for a comparison of texts, to vol. 20, preface to part 2, in the Bach-Gesellschaft edition already cited.

⁷⁸ BWV 198.

⁷⁹ On Henrici, see the work on Gottsched by Wanick (1897).

⁸⁰ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:334.

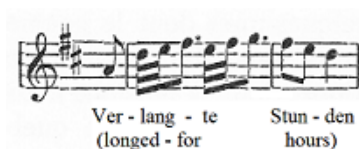
⁸¹ The text of this Passion is given in vol. 20, preface to pt. 2, in the Bach-Gesellschaft edition.

To end this study of the principal works in which Bach uses a new text with an earlier composition, it is fitting to point out that the first chorus from the “Ascension Oratorio,” *Lobet Gott in Seinen Reichen*,⁸² comes from the music of the lost cantata *Froher Tag, verlangte Stunden* (Happy day, longed-for hours), performed 5 June 1732 to celebrate the opening of the expanded St. Thomas’s school. Philipp Spitta had already guessed that this oratorio chorus must not be original, but he did not seek to identify the subject on which it was created. He satisfied himself by noting—in measures 89 to 91 and 121 to 123 of the soprano part—some syncopations that seemed to him to have originally had an expressive role that the present words no longer explained.⁸³ But the text from the chorus *Froher Tag, verlangte Stunden* very clearly interprets these syncopations and all the other significant details of the adapted music. The bright and sonorous theme at the beginning is just as suitable for expressing praise as it is for celebrating joy (ex. 9.4).

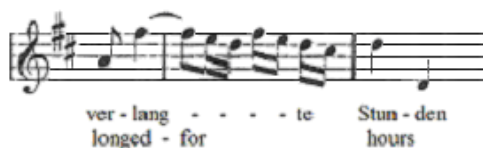


Ex. 9.4. *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*, BWV 11/1, mm. 33–36.

With well-structured rhythmic motifs, Bach in turn interprets impatience (measure 39 in the soprano part) (ex. 9.5a) and the obstinacy of desire (measure 42) (ex. 9.5b).



Ex. 9.5a. *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*, BWV 11/1, mm. 39–40.

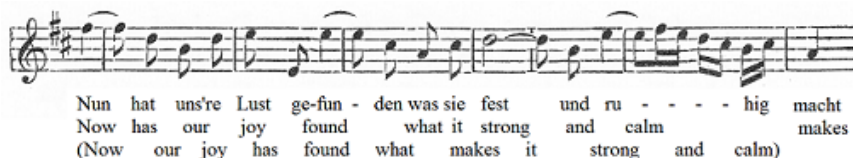


Ex. 9.5b. *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*, BWV 11/1, mm. 42–44.

⁸² BWV 11/1, mm. 1–6 et seq.

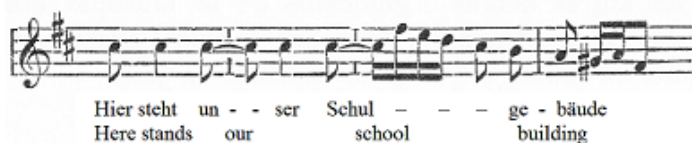
⁸³ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:425.

The poet—a teacher of mediocre inspiration at St. Thomas’s school—continues: “Now, our joy has found what makes it strong and calm.” The music leans powerfully on these words that proclaim steadfast happiness (ex. 9.6).



Ex. 9.6. *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*, BWV 11/1, mm. 49–56.

The syncopated motifs that Spitta points out in this cantata appear in the middle of the chorus constructed in the form of an aria. The same note is repeated, and it obstinately holds up the rhythmic current—an action which must symbolize the strong solidity of the edifice that has been built (ex. 9.7).



Ex. 9.7. *Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*, BWV 11/1, mm. 89–92.

Finally, in the next-to-last verse, the word “Freude” (joy) is ornamented in the second reprise with a large melisma that the four voices simultaneously suspend.⁸⁴

We could undoubtedly come to discover music that Bach intended for different parts of this lost cantata by making similar comparisons in other compositions.

The same comparative work would produce some interesting results if we applied it to looking for the original text of certain cantatas in which the interpretation of the words seems superficial or incomplete. Among Bach’s works that have disappeared, the poems for them still exist, and in comparing these poems to other poems of the same feeling and identical length in music that has been preserved for us, perhaps we would come to recognize several remnants of these lost works. But, in all truth, these discoveries would still remain imperfect, even if

⁸⁴ The original text is found in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Y h 571) under the title: *Als die E. Hoch-Edlen und Hoch-Weisen Rathe der Stadt Leipzig neugebauete und engerichtete Schule zu St. Thomae den 5 Jun durch etliche Reden eingeweyhet wurde, ward folgende Cantata dabey verfertigt und aufgeführt von Joh. Sebastian Bach, Furstl. Sachs Weissenfels, Capellmeister, und besagter Scholen Cantore, und M. Johann Heinrich Winckler, Collega IV.* Spitta gives this entire libretto (*J. S. Bach*, 2:888).

we were certain of having the later works we sought. For, as we have seen above, Bach very often reworks the orchestration in his transcriptions or modifies some traits of the work that he is adapting. So the benefit of such experiments would be mediocre from the purely musical point of view because it would be difficult to accept, without reservation, the compositions reconstructed in this way. But the remarks made in the course of this chapter should contribute to, if not substantially enrich, the general study of Bach's expressive style—at least by helping to establish, in some cases, the order of succession of his works.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ I will return later to this study.

CHAPTER TEN

EXPRESSION IN BACH'S INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Instrumental works employed in the cantatas. – The chorale preludes. – Program music. – Pieces in which meaning is determined by the motifs or by the harmonies.

Instrumental Works Employed in the Cantatas

Just as in his vocal music written for a given text, Bach's expressive intentions are clearly recognizable most of the time in his instrumental music.

We will see first of all that a fairly large number of his works of pure music also appear with words added to them in his cantatas; therefore, these instrumental compositions have been explained by Bach himself.

The *Adagio* from the concerto for clavier in D minor¹ is recast in the cantata *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*.² With an ingenious realization of the basso continuo from the concerto, Bach constructs a four-voice chorus out of the accompaniment to the plaintive melody stated by the clavier.³ The motif from the introduction is harmonized at first by the chorus, and

¹ BWV 1052/2, mm. 1–13.

² BWV 146/1, mm. 1–13.

³ In the cantata, the clavier is replaced by the organ obbligato.

basso continuo and the fullness of the rhythm in the vocal part give this music a captivating charm. It acts as an incantation and, little by little, seizes our spirit. A delicious reverie is born from this steady murmur that sustains its caress of dark harmonies and, without being interrupted, continually surprises us with its daring modulations. Within the lethargy of the deadened will created by the rhythmic monotony, the lyrical progressions of the musical discourse take on a strange power. While the text is proclaiming the annihilation of the soul's earthly love and the exaltation of the love of God, the music conveys, through its profound symbolism, the tranquility of renunciation and the awakening of spiritual life. On one hand, Bach aspires to describe the agony resulting from vain pleasures, and on the other, he produces a hymn of mystical wisdom, victorious over desire. But he gives a foretaste of ascetic happiness by pleasing the senses, and he disdains passion in a passionate voice. Even when he preaches distrust of things human, he uses images that recall them. He does not know how to speak through abstraction, but his style is always nourished by allegories, popular speech, or biblical poetry. If he wants to portray the soul falling in love with God, he sings of it with the same desperate tenderness that he would for building up to the delirium of the soul enamored with another human being. In this fervent music, the premonition of divine ecstasy and the remembrance of earthly passions are intertwined. We will not try to discover how to differentiate between them here, but this mixture of meanings itself shows us that Bach acknowledged a great, expressive richness in his instrumental works. Certainly, we can contend that Bach never thought of a religious subject that he could use later on when he was composing the *Siciliano* for the clavier concerto, and I do not claim that he did. But what matters to us is to realize that the concerto already contains all the meaningful substance from which the aria is formed: the separated undulations of the bass, the persistence of the melody, and an exquisite bitterness of the chord progressions. Without the aid of any text, we could regard the *Siciliano* as a kind of exalted lullaby, and this is just what Bach describes to us in his cantata.

The *Cantabile, ma un poco Adagio*⁷ from the sonata in G for violin and clavier is converted into an aria for the cantata *Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille*,⁸ which was sung for the election of the Leipzig council. The soprano melody is based on the clavier part, while the violin plays the original solo part, and the strings realize harmonies upon the basso continuo.⁹ Spitta only mentions that Bach made use of the *Adagio* from the sonata in this cantata, but he does show astonishing insight into the composer's thought through the comments he makes about the instrumental work. He notes that it is distinguished by a very particular character, and he finds something of a wedding song in it. "A sweet perfume," he writes, "and—something extremely rare in Bach—a breath of beautiful sensuality

⁶ BWV 1053/2, mm. 7–14 et seq.

⁷ BWV 1019/3, mm. 1–19 et seq.

⁸ BWV 120/4, mm. 1–19 et seq.

⁹ Bach has added two measures in the cantata aria (BWV 120/4, mm. 45–46).

hovers over this *Adagio*. The detailed marking (Cantabile, ma un poco Adagio) strikes us right away, for the master usually neglects such indications. Additionally, he develops a trading off of agreed-upon maneuvers between the two upper voices—an exchange of words from the mouth of one to that of the other. They blend into the same thought while the bass merely sustains the harmony . . .¹⁰ Thus, through this abundance of images, Spitta reveals the very spirit of the composition. I do not know if he is inspired, in this passage I have just cited, by the explanation that Bach added to this work himself when he coupled it with words, but the two descriptions—one by the historian and one by the composer—agree marvelously. Here is the text of the soprano aria: “Well-being and blessing shall and must at all times come upon our government in desired measure, so that justice and faithfulness kiss each other as friends.”

As we see, the general feeling of the poetry that Bach adapted to the *Adagio* from the sonata is one of affectionate joy. Moreover, he has also re-worked several fragments of the melody to place them more directly in connection with the words. So, from quite a free arabesque on the clavier, he extracts a very simple diatonic motif, in which the note groupings repeat themselves twice when he wants to lean, as is his tendency, on the word that contains the idea of wishing for.¹¹ For the word “Recht” (justice), he writes a short, major arpeggio. But he barely alters the florid passages of the clavier (ex. 10.2a) to connect them with the adverb “freundlich” (friendly) (ex. 10.2b). This is because these figures from the sonata already possessed the pliant grace of the motifs that he customarily links to words of welcome and benevolence:¹²



Ex. 10.2a. *Sonate VI in G-major for Violin and Cembalo*, BWV 1019a, mm. 49–54.

¹⁰ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:299.

¹¹ See, for example, the interpretation of the word “Wunsch” (wish) in the arioso duo of the secular cantata *Was mir behagt* (BWV 208/5, mm. 18–27).

¹² See exs. 3.25a–o and preceding text.



Ex. 10.2b. *Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille*, BWV 120/4, mm. 47–52.

We find yet another version, with voice, of the same *Adagio* in the wedding cantata *Herr Gott, Beherrscher aller Dinge* (Lord God, ruler of all things),¹³ in which Bach also reworks the first chorus from the cantata *Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille*.¹⁴ Here, the interpretation is not as complete or as successful. But, even if the images do not have entirely the same congruity, and even if the arrangement of the text is not perfect, at least the subject of the chorus has some connection to the subject of the aria from the cantata for the council election. The words of the chorus (“God, one praises thee in the stillness of Zion, and one pays vows to thee”) evoke the same ideas of fondness and benediction as these from the aria (“O God, guide this newly-wedded couple by thy love. Make powerfully real in them what thy Word has promised us by saying that thee always wishes to fill those who love thee with thy blessings”).

The first chorus from the cantata *Unser Mund sei voll Lachens*¹⁵ is based on the *Overture* in D major for three trumpets, three oboes, bassoon, strings, and basso continuo.¹⁶ Note first that the very stately “French overture” form suits this subject perfectly. The cantata was intended for the celebration of Christmas, and Bach uses this overture form in other works to celebrate the coming of the Messiah.¹⁷ Moreover, even the details of the music here correspond to and interpret the text: “May our mouths be full of laughter and our tongues full of praises. For the Lord hath done great things for us.” We can see that the theme developed in the orchestra bears some resemblance to the motifs Bach uses to depict laughter. The repeated notes in the third measure after the entrance of the voices (3/4), have a very clear imitative effect, and it is useful to compare this passage with a passage

¹³ BWV 120a/1, mm. 1–24.

¹⁴ B. G. 120/2, mm. 1–24.

¹⁵ BWV 110/1, mm. 1–13 et seq.

¹⁶ BWV 1069/1, mm. 1–13 et seq.

¹⁷ For example, at the beginning of the cantata *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland I* (BWV 61).

in the bass aria “Den Wachsthum” from the *Peasant Cantata*,¹⁸ in which Bach interprets the word “lachen” (to laugh) in a similar way.¹⁹

Lastly, I should mention that the splendid joy of the finale from the first of the concertos dedicated to the margrave of Brandenburg in 1721 opens out wonderfully in the first chorus of the cantata *Vereinigte Zwietracht der wechselnden Saiten* (Combined discord of the alternating strings),²⁰ performed in honor of Gottlieb Korte (1698–1731) upon his appointment as professor at the University of Leipzig (1726).

* * *

We also encounter among Bach’s instrumental pieces several whose meaning he has specified by placing them at the beginning of certain of his cantatas. In fact, there is always a direct correspondence between the composition he uses to preface these cantatas and the cantatas themselves. This expressive bond is quite recognizable in the tearful *Sinfonias* that precede the choruses full of sadness that begin the cantatas *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*²¹ and *Weinen, Klagen*.²² The *Sinfonia* from the cantata *Christ lag in Todes Banden*²³ shows Bach’s intent to portray the Savior as a prisoner of death, to pity and adore him; and, in the *Sinfonia* (called *Sonatina*) from the cantata *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* (*Actus Tragicus*; A tragic act),²⁴ the music describes the sweetness of the “time marked by God” for the Christian’s final slumber.

In joining these pieces drawn from purely instrumental works to his cantatas, Bach clearly demonstrates that he finds a correlation of feelings—or images—between the compositions he allies in this way. Moreover, these connections are easily recognizable. Consider, for example, the *Sinfonia* from the cantata for the council election *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir*, which is a transcription of the *Preludio* from the E-major solo violin partita.²⁵ The organ plays the violin part, the orchestra adds a flashing accompaniment in which three trumpets and the kettledrums “bring a fine noise”—as it was called in the 17th century—and the oboes reinforce the violins. The chorus that follows is one of joy and thanksgiving; but, in the motif from the prelude, we can already see the

¹⁸ BWV 212/21, mm. 36–45.

¹⁹ See also the alto aria from the cantata *Wo gehest du hin?* (BWV 166/5, mm. 11–23).

²⁰ BWV 207/2, mm. 16–24 et seq.

²¹ BWV 21/1, mm. 1–6 et seq.

²² BWV 12/1, mm. 1–6 et seq.

²³ BWV 4/1, mm. 1–14.

²⁴ BWV 106/1, mm. 1–8 et seq.

²⁵ BWV 1006/1, mm. 1–13 et seq. The same prelude is arranged for clavier [or lute] (BWV 1006a/1, mm. 1–13 et seq.).

melodic and rhythmic elements that usually make up the theme of joyfulness (ex. 10.3).²⁶



Ex. 10.3. *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir*, BWV 29/1, mm. 1–5.

From the *Allegro* in the D-minor clavier concerto,²⁷ Bach fashions the introduction to the cantata *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsaal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*²⁸ (“we must enter the kingdom of God through much tribulation”). No performer should play the D-minor concerto without knowing the symbol that the composer has created from this piece, in which the jolting motions of the orchestra contrast with the active, assiduous, and persevering pace of the solo instrument.²⁹

At the threshold of the cantata *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe*,³⁰ the *Largo* from the same D-minor concerto becomes a sort of loving prayer to God, upon whom the “blissful end” depends.

Joined to the cantata *Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen*,³¹ the final *Allegro* from the E-major concerto³² is rendered in its entirety. The initial theme, with a very simple structure, blends with the motifs that Bach customarily uses to interpret the word “gehen” (to go),³³ and, as for the second theme, it very distinctly states the ascending chromatic theme sung on the word “Verlangen” (longing) in the bass aria from the same cantata.³⁴

The cantata *Gott soll allein mein Herze haben*³⁵ is preceded by the first part of the same E-major concerto. Bright and cheerful, and with a soothing harmony, the prelude has a perfect unity of feeling with the words of the cantata: “God alone shall have my heart, I find in him the highest worth.” This resolute music flows out perpetually like a great river, and we understand its meaning even better when the

²⁶ See exs. 2.12a–c and preceding text.

²⁷ BWV 1052/1, mm. 1–7 et seq.

²⁸ BWV 146/1, mm. 1–7 et seq.

²⁹ Hans von Bülow considered this composition to be unmusical!

³⁰ BWV 156/1, mm. 1–7 et seq. See the *Clavier Concerto No. 5 in F minor* (BWV 1056/2, mm. 1–7).

³¹ BWV 49/1, mm. 1–19 et seq.

³² BWV 1053/3, mm. 1–19 et seq.

³³ See exs. 2.9, 2.10 and preceding texts.

³⁴ See exs. 2.62, 2.63 and their related texts.

³⁵ BWV 169/1, mm. 1–10 et seq.

alto sings “God, however, is the fount replete with streams. There I can draw that which will sufficiently and truly refresh me for all time.”

In the first aria of the cantata *Ich liebe den Höchsten von ganzen Gemüte*,³⁶ the alto—who sings of her absolute love for the Most High—calls God “The fount of goodness for all time,” and the *Sinfonia* that opens this cantata appears to depict the infinite gushing forth of the torrent of blessings. As in a succession of waves, the different groups of instruments propel the surges. And for creating an image of such a current of thanks that leads the soul to the Lord, Bach transcribes the first *Allegro* from the G-major Brandenburg concerto³⁷ composed for three violins, three violas, three cellos, violone, and cembalo. But, for coloring the mass of alternating billows in the *Sinfonia*, he adds two horns, three oboes, and a bassoon to the strings, making the sonority both warmer and deeper: this fullness itself is again symbolic—evoking both the generosity of divine mercy and the depth of Christian gratitude.

* * *

The Chorale Preludes

Before beginning to examine the meaning of Bach’s music that is devoid of any literary affinity, we must study his organ chorale preludes—a very interesting category of purely instrumental pieces whose creation is determined by words that are only implied. The texts of the Lutheran hymns are, in fact, reflected in the motifs, harmonies, and rhythms from these verses based on traditional melodies. Here Bach puts into practice—well before it was proclaimed—the precept laid down by Johann Mattheson on the subject of improvisations that the organist plays before the cantatas or chorales: “The short preludes that issue from the organist’s fantasy must strive to express, through sonorous figures, the passion itself that relates to the words of the composition he is going to perform, or to the chorale that the congregation is going to sing.”³⁸ Moreover, Bach is not the first of German organists who strives to announce to the faithful, through the organ’s language, not only the chorale melody, but also the chorale’s character. It was quite often necessary for the organist to try to do this so that the congregation was alerted to exactly which hymn was going to be sung. In fact, we find many different texts for the same melody, and sometimes these texts have opposite meanings. Mattheson notes that the chorales *Ach, wie elend ist unsre Zeit* (Ah! How wretched is our time) and *Er ist das Heil uns kommen her* (Our salvation has come to us) are sung

³⁶ BWV 174/2, mm. 16–20.

³⁷ BWV 1048/1, mm. 1–8 et seq.

³⁸ Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg: 1739), pt. 3, chap. 25, § 25.

on the same hymn-tune. He also recalls that *Ich komm itzt als ein armer Gast* (I come now, like a poor guest) and *Nun freut euch* (Rejoice now) are intoned the same; and he knew twenty-one hymns to the melody of *Ach, was soll ich Sünder machen* (Oh, what shall I do sinners), twenty-four on *Herzlich thut mich verlangen* (I do sincerely ask for), and fifty-five on *O, Gott du frommer Gott* (Oh, God, thou good God).³⁹ So there was a need for the organist to state the subject as distinctly as possible and to indicate, more or less, if the poem of the chorale would be sad or joyous. Some of Bach's precursors charged themselves with creating such explicit formulations, and he could even find some models in the works by the composers in his own family. For example, Heinrich Bach (1615–92) chose an ascending chromatic counter-subject to express the plaintive prayer in the fugal prelude to the chorale *Erbarm' dich mein, o Herre Gott* (Have pity for me, O Lord God).⁴⁰ In a prelude to the same chorale, J. Nicolaus Hanff—born in 1630 in Wechmar, the homeland of Heinrich Bach, and died in 1706 in Schleswig, where he was cathedral organist—used both descending and ascending chromatic motifs. And since the meaning of these melodic sequences in the 17th century is quite specific, we can be certain that Hanff did not compose them here without an expressive intention.⁴¹ In the chorale *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz* (Why are you downcast, O my heart), Johann Christoph Bach (1643–1703), the son of Heinrich, obstinately repeats the descending chromatic theme⁴² that Johann Sebastian mingles with the vocal harmonies like an incessant moan in the first chorus from the cantata based on the same chorale.⁴³

We also encounter some organists among Bach's contemporaries who attempt to render clear and striking their organ pieces composed on hymn-tunes. In *Ehrenpforte* (1740), Mattheson cites Christoph Raupach, organist at Stralsund who, "in the year 1710, sometimes performed certain musical allusions ("allusiones") on the organ during the clergy's recession on Sunday afternoon. He had the printed words of the verses from the chorales that he had chosen distributed beforehand among the worshipers. His aim in doing this was to show those who usually focused only on the simple organ melodies that, through well-arranged preludes agreeing with the contents of the words and through an ingenious gay, serious, or sad variation, self-communion in the listeners could be better awakened and maintained while the organist was playing these pieces than if he only played the very simple chorale melodies—provided the listeners followed and reflected upon the printed words. For example, on the eighth Sunday after Trinity of 1710, he presented the following topic in a sonata on the organ: God's children complain of their temptations, then they are consoled by God's saving Word. This sonata was divided into three parts. First, temptation was expressed through a verse taken from

³⁹ Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, pt. 3, chap. 25, § 30.

⁴⁰ August Gottfried Ritter, *Zur Geschichte des Orgelspiels* (Leipzig: 1884), pt. 2, 169.

⁴¹ Ritter, *Zur Geschichte des Orgelspiels*, pt. 2, 199.

⁴² Ritter, *Zur Geschichte des Orgelspiels*, pt. 2, 171.

⁴³ BWV 138/1, mm. 6–11.

the hymn *Wo Gott der Herr nicht bey uns hält* (Where God the Lord does not stand with us): “They are nearly enraged and they approach threateningly.” Next, lamenting appears in the stanza “Ach, Gott, von Himmel sich darein” (Ah, God, look into this from heaven). Lastly, joyous consolation was proclaimed by the eighth verse from the chorale *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her* (Now salvation is come hither to us): “Hope awaits the foretold hour.”⁴⁴

Like Raupach, Johann Sebastian wanted the organ’s non-verbal speech to be as persuasive as a song. During his second stay at Weimar (1708–17)—and before 1715—he had as a student Johann Gothilf Ziegler, born in Dresden in 1688, who wrote in 1746 “For playing the chorale, my teacher, the kapellmeister Bach, still living, taught it to me in such a way that I would not play the chorales simply as written, but according to the feeling indicated by the words.”⁴⁵ In Bach’s *Orgelbüchlein*—a collection of forty-five organ chorale preludes composed at Weimar and intended to serve as models to young organists for learning how “to deal with a chorale in every way”⁴⁶—he shows that he wants to evoke, through the organ verses, the meaning of the texts of the hymns that he preludes. To make up for the absent words in these pieces, we again find the meaningful formulas that we have examined in his vocal music and in his cantata accompaniments. With these consistent patterns, he describes the actions or states of being that the words impart to us. The motifs of even rhythm and simple succession move ceaselessly to depict the Savior’s arrival on earth,⁴⁷ the flight of angels descended from the heavens,⁴⁸ and the elusive flow of days that “dissipate like a fog in the sun . . . and vanish like an unending wave.”⁴⁹ The chorale that tells of Christ’s resurrection is illustrated with ascending motifs.⁵⁰ In Simeon’s hymn “I go in peace and joyously,” the contrapuntal melodies rise to symbolize the soul’s ascension, and they are gently cadenced according to the rhythm of joyfulness⁵¹ that Bach so often used.⁵² Some groups of notes of different values are also found in chorale preludes that celebrate “the wonderful day” (Easter),⁵³ the Christian’s gratitude for Christ the redeemer,⁵⁴

⁴⁴ Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte* (Hamburg: 1740), 287.

⁴⁵ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:519.

⁴⁶ BWV 599–644.

⁴⁷ *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her* (BWV 638, mm. 1–10).

⁴⁸ *Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schaar* (BWV 607, mm. 1–4 et seq.). The accompaniment, in the chorale prelude *Von Himmel hoch* (BWV 606, mm. 1–5 et seq.) also describes the poised flight of angels. In a Christmas cantata, Johann Kuhnau illustrates, by large motifs that seem to hover, the melody of the same chorale. The violins, in unison, play there continuously, laying out alternately descending and climbing sonorous lines. (Library of the city of Leipzig, no. 119.)

⁴⁹ *Ach wie nichtig* (BWV 644, mm. 1–4 et seq.). See the cantata based on the same hymn (BWV 26/1, mm. 1–14 et seq.).

⁵⁰ *Erstanden ist der heil’ge Christ* (BWV 628, mm. 1–4 et seq.).

⁵¹ *Mit Fried’ und Freud’ ich fahr’ dahin* (BWV 616, mm. 1–3 et seq.).

⁵² See exs. 3.21–3.23 and their related texts.

⁵³ *Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag* (BWV 629, mm. 1–4 et seq.).

and the praise of God.⁵⁵ Again, through an ingenious rhythmic configuration, Bach comments delightfully on the Christmas chorale “The day so full of joy.”⁵⁶ And, just as in the chaconnes, he sets to a basso ostinato the preludes *In dir ist Freude* (In Thee is joy)⁵⁷ and *Heut' triumphiret Gottes Sohn* (Today the son of God triumphs).⁵⁸

The rhythmic figure in the cantatas that Bach frequently associates with words that proclaim prostration under a heavy burden⁵⁹ also appears in the organ chorales to spark a memory of the absent words through an easily recognized allusion. We find it in the prelude to the hymn-tune *O Gottes Lamm, unschuldig* (O innocent lamb of God sacrificed on the wood of the cross).⁶⁰ In the fifth line, Nicolaus Decius (d. 1529) writes “You have borne all sins,” and the entire organ piece is based on this phrase, which, from start to finish, is reflected in the motivic lines joined to the impassive hymn-tune (ex. 10.4):



Ex. 10.4. *O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig*, BWV 618, mm. 1–2.

In an earlier chapter, I cited a similar motif joined to the word “tragen” (carry) in the first aria from the cantata *Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen* (BWV 56),⁶¹ and Bach uses this deeply meaningful rhythm again in the organ chorale prelude *O Mensch, beweine deine Sünde gross* (O Man, lament thy great sins)⁶² when he states the melodic fragment corresponding to the words “He carried the heavy burden of our sins”⁶³ (ex. 10.5).

⁵⁴ *Wir danken dir* (BWV 623, mm. 1–4 et seq.).

⁵⁵ *Lob sei dem allmächtigen Gott* (BWV 602, mm. 1–4 et seq.).

⁵⁶ *Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich* (BWV 605, mm. 1–6 et seq.).

⁵⁷ BWV 615, mm. 1–8 et seq.

⁵⁸ BWV 630, mm. 1–4 et seq. Mattheson tells us that sometimes organists played, as the clergy recessed, a piece in chaconne form with all stops drawn.

⁵⁹ See exs. 3.12a, b and preceding text.

⁶⁰ BWV 618, mm. 1–5 et seq.

⁶¹ See exs. 3.12a, b and preceding text.

⁶² BWV 622, mm. 1–4 et seq.

⁶³ Note that the same chorale, sung by four voices at the end of part one of the *St. Matthew Passion*, is accompanied in the orchestra by a continuous motif similar to those that I am citing here (BWV 244/35, mm. 1–4 et seq.).



Ex. 10.5. *O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross*, BWV 622, mm. 20–22.

The last words of the same chorale recall Jesus's torture, nailed "a long time to the cross." Since Bach could not leave this painful thought unnoticed, he disrupts the hymn's phrase and turns it into the very motif of compassion—this theme that he so often calls upon for lamentation when it represents Christ's dying or the despairing soul. But here, in the pedal part, he joins the ascending chromatic motif to the weary plaint that relents, half-step by half-step. It seems to proclaim again the redemption earned through suffering, because it already appeared several measures earlier accompanying the melodic fragment corresponding to the line where Jesus is named as victim to be sacrificed for us.

The expressive chromatic motifs occur frequently in the organ chorale preludes, and in the accompaniment to the German *Te Deum* (*Herr Gott! dich loben wir*; Lord God! We praise thee)—played "per omnes versus" (in all verses)—the theme of sorrow passes from voice to voice in an ascending chromatic sequence when we come to it in the stanza that celebrates the redemption of the faithful "through the blood" of Christ, desire for divine aid, and consolation after suffering (ex. 10.6).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ BWV 725, mm. 113–117. I am recalling that the words evoking God's comforting are sung on the ascending chromatic motif in the cantata *Das ist je gewisslich wahr* (BWV 141/4, mm. 19–21). See also exs. 2.59a, b; 2.60; 2.61 and their related text in this volume. [This cantata was composed by Georg Philipp Telemann according to Unger, *Handbook*, 490.—Trans.]

(Nun hilf uns, dei-ne Die - - ner tröst Die du
(Now help us, thy servants' consolation Who thou

Pedal

mit dei - - nem Blut er - löst.)
by thy lost blood.)

Ex. 10.6. *Herr Gott, dich loben wir*, BWV 326, mm. 103–112.

These two opposing themes are already found in the eighth *Partita* on the chorale *O Gott, du frommer Gott*.⁶⁵ The lines by the poet Johann Heermann (1585–1647) found in the chorale contain a prayer in which he asks that Jesus's death be proof of His blessed mission—which inspires Bach to combine the Passion and Redemption motifs in the *Partita*. Heermann also asks God to grant his body rest in a Christian burial ground, and Bach interprets this wish through his musical language with several repeated notes in a dotted rhythm that come just before the long, final note⁶⁶—which brings to mind the grave's eternal peace after the earth has been shoveled onto the coffin and has covered it completely.⁶⁷

At the end of the great chorale prelude *Kyrie, Gott heilger Geist* (Lord, God the Holy ghost)⁶⁸ supplication is interpreted by chromatic motifs, and in the chorale *Das alte Jahr vergangen ist* (The old year has gone by)⁶⁹ they revive the memory of past dangers and give more urgency to the plea of the faithful.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ BWV 767/8, mm. 1–4.

⁶⁶ BWV 767/8, mm. 13–16.

⁶⁷ See Tunder's works: *Gesangswerke*, ed. Seiffert, *Denkmäler deutsche Tonkunst* (1900) Series 1, 3:103, first stave.

⁶⁸ BWV 671, mm. 45–51.

⁶⁹ BWV 614, mm. 1–4 et seq.

⁷⁰ The chromatic theme also figures in the preludes on the chorales *O Lamm Gottes* (BWV 618, mm. 101–105) and *Jesus Christus, unser Heiland* (BWV 626, mm. 27–38). We also find it in the chorale prelude *Christus, der uns selig macht* (BWV 620, mm. 8–24).

We also meet the descending chromatic theme in the prelude to the chorale *Wir glauben all' an einen Gott, Schöpfer* (the German “Credo”).⁷¹ It corresponds to the passage from the second verse that sings of Christ “dying on the cross,” and the principal motif of this organ piece is inspired by the text as well. Each of the verses begins with the words “We believe,” and to symbolize the steadfastness of faith proclaimed in this way, Bach gives the first notes a willful rhythm that conflicts with the pace of the other voices throughout the composition.⁷² A third subject appears at regular intervals played on the pedal organ, and it is a kind of variation of the scale, presented as climbing, then descending. This uniform and precise pattern of even movement seems inspired by a passage in the text that recalls the Holy Spirit: “He holds all of Christianity on earth with exactly the same spirit.”⁷³ Through each of these three subjects, Bach expresses the essential idea contained in each of the verses: belief in God the creator who presides over all, belief in the redeeming Son, and belief in the Holy Spirit who guides souls.

In the chorale-fantasy *Jesu, meine Freude* (Jesus, my joy),⁷⁴ the musical commentary refers to two thoughts that Bach liked to interpret. In the beginning he develops a theme in the hymn’s accompaniment that, although in the minor mode, belongs—because of its rhythm and its melodic structure—to the category of joyous themes (ex. 10.7).⁷⁵



Ex. 10.7. *Fantasia on Jesu, meine Freude*, BWV 713, mm. 1–2.

But after he has lingered over describing the Christian’s rapture of the Christian who finds in Jesus “his joy, the nourishment of his heart, and the adornment of his soul,” he wants to say even more passionately how much he loves “the divine lamb, the betrothed.” Here, he leaves aside the chorale melody, and, while he has faithfully stated it up to this moment—sometimes in the sopranos, sometimes in the altos, tenors, or basses—he does no more than indicate several

⁷¹ BWV 680, mm. 7–10, 18–21, etc.

⁷² See the examples of similar motifs that depict resistance in exs. 3.12a, b and their preceding text in this volume.

⁷³ Some motifs of similar structure and meaning are cited in exs. 2.8 and 2.9 of this volume. See also the cantata *Tritt auf die Glaubensbahn* (BWV 152/5, mm. 12–17) before these words in the bass recitative: “die blinde Leiterin” (The blind guide).

⁷⁴ BWV 713a, mm. 1–11.

⁷⁵ See exs. 2.13a–c and related text, as well as exs. 3.22a, b and exs. 3.23a, b and related texts.

lines of it in a graceful and tender ternary rhythmic variation that is completely dominated by the memory that the Passion and the words "lamb of God" have awakened in his mind. The themes of "bearing the cross" and of Jesus's death appear in the first measures (ex. 10.8).⁷⁶



Ex. 10.8. *Fantasia on Jesu, meine Freude*, BWV 713, mm. 53–61.

In other large chorale preludes, a single intention governs the entire composition. Therefore, the one based on the communion hymn *Schmücke dich, O liebe Seele* (Adorn thyself, O dear soul)⁷⁷ is completely wreathed in small arabesques that float in an atmosphere of caressing harmonies. The uninterrupted course of the river and the ebb and flow of waves is represented in the chorale prelude *Christ, unser Herr, sum Jordan kam* (Christ, our Lord, came to the Jordan)⁷⁸ by the swift and even motif played by the left hand and by the patterns that move symmetrically in the two right-hand parts while the hymn-tune is stated in the pedal.

As in the cantatas, the idea of strict obligation is shown by the constrained canonic form in the organ chorale prelude *Dies sind die heil'gen zehn Gebot* (Here are the ten holy commandments).⁷⁹ It seems that, in the grand prelude on *Vater unser* (Our Father),⁸⁰ this procedure has the same significance as in the first chorus from the cantata *Ich elender Mensch, wer wird mich erlösen vom Leibe dieses Todes* (Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?).⁸¹

⁷⁶ I cited above, in ex. 10.4, the motif that Bach uses to accompany the chorale *O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig*.

⁷⁷ BWV 654, mm. 1–6 et seq.

⁷⁸ BWV 684, mm. 1–10 et seq.

⁷⁹ BWV 678, mm. 1–8 et seq.

⁸⁰ BWV 682, mm. 1–14 et seq.

⁸¹ BWV 48/1, mm. 12–21 et seq.

To make the desire for deliverance more vivid, Bach creates some chains through the music, and within this setting of captivity he inspires hope for liberation. If we consider that in the chorale prelude *Vater unser* the chromatic theme of sorrow and dying and the ascending chromatic theme of redemption frequently intervene, we are convinced that this long, canonic version recalls the stanza from the hymn in which Luther paraphrases the last words of the Lord's Prayer: "Deliver us from evil . . . Deliver us from eternal death, and console us in our final distress."

By using some large, altered intervals in his organ chorale preludes as he does in his cantatas,⁸² Bach means to suggest images of disorder and desolation. So, in the *Orgel-Büchlein* chorale composed on the hymn-tune *Durch Adam's Fall ist ganz verderbt* (Through Adam's fall, human nature was completely spoiled),⁸³ he repeats several times a sequence of motifs containing ponderously falling diminished-sevenths.⁸⁴

* * *

Program Music

It is not only in the organ chorale preludes⁸⁵—which Max Reger so rightly calls "little symphonic poems"⁸⁶—that we can recognize phrases with specific meanings. Bach has also left us a clavier work based on a definite program. This composition, in which we find some motifs that are very often occur in the cantatas, is quite precisely dated. As the title tells us, we know that Bach wrote it at the time of the departure of his "beloved brother" (*Capriccio sopra la lontananza del suo fratello dilettissimo*; Caprice on the departure/absence of his beloved brother).⁸⁷ This was Bach's brother Johann Jakob, born in 1682. He had spent some

⁸² See exs. 2.33a–f and preceding text.

⁸³ BWV 637, mm. 1–4 et seq.

⁸⁴ In an earlier work, I pointed out that Buxtehude interpreted the same chorale by accompanying it with descending fifths in the pedal (Pirro, *L'Orgue de J. S. Bach* [Paris: Fischbacher, 1895], 1150). See Buxtehude's organ works, pub. Spitta, 2:73.

⁸⁵ To complete this study of Bach's chorales, I refer the reader to the admirable book by Spitta (*J. S. Bach*, 1:589 and following, and 2:692) and to Schweitzer's ingenious analyses in *J. S. Bach, le Musicien-Poète*, 341.

⁸⁶ In his piano arrangements of the chorales (Jos. Aibl, ed., Munich). Cf. *Seb. Bach und die Tonkunst des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, by Dr. Arthur S. Prüfer (Leipzig: Poeschel & Trepte, 1902), 13.

⁸⁷ BWV 992. [Pirro does not give a French translation of this Italian title, and the Johann Möller manuscript compiled by Johann Christoph Bach (1671–1721) gives the title as *Capriccio Sopra il Lontananza de il Fratello dilettissimo*, which Christoph Wolff translates as "Capriccio on the Departure of the Beloved Brother" and posits that the work may have been written in honor of Bach's former schoolmate Georg Erdmann. *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000), 74–5. Boyd also says

time at the secondary school in Ohrdruf with Johann Sebastian but had left there during the 1695–96 school year.⁸⁸ It was undoubtedly then that Johann Jakob began his apprenticeship as “performer of woodwind instruments” with his father’s successor at Eisenach. Around 1704, he enrolled in the band of the Swedish guard and served in the campaigns of Charles XII,⁸⁹ and Johann Sebastian’s *Capriccio* pertains to this period. It is both graphic and expressive in that it describes actions as well as feelings, and we find it contains the same mixture of imitation and psychology as Johann Kuhnau’s biblical sonatas. Consequently, the best introduction and the most accurate elucidation that we can propose for this “capriccio” by Bach can be found in the preface that Kuhnau wrote to introduce his *Musicalische Vorstellung einiger Biblischer Historien* (Musical presentation of some biblical stories) (1700): “It is well known that all the virtuosi, particularly those of earlier times, did their utmost to stir up through music nearly the same effects achieved by the masters of oratory, sculpture, and painting, although we must grant these arts a certain prerogative over music on this point. There are few children of three or four years of age who cannot guess what the artist’s brush or chisel has wanted to show No one denies that people are incited to laugh or cry when they see a painting of a joyous occasion or a sad scene, but eloquence in music completely captivates the listeners’ souls with its power, and it can mold them, like sealing wax, according to a form that is sad, gay, compassionate, irritated, amorous, etc. And, although we must acknowledge that music does not lack efficacy, it seems difficult to prove that a composer is capable of moving listeners’ souls at will. Certainly, he can do it very much if he understands well the principles of art, the properties of mode, intervals, time, meter, and other similar things. But for him to have absolute power over his listeners, and for this power to be given him to move everyone—now to joy, now to sadness, love, or even hate, and whether it be cruelty or pity—very few agree to allow that this can happen. . . . We customarily listen to vocal music so that it will act in a special way on our spirits because its words contribute very much—even the greatest part—to stirring up our thoughts. . . . Compositions for the theatre and opera, whether the subject be religious or secular, have successfully proven the masters’ ability for expressing the passions and other subjects. . . . But when instrumental music alone must arouse the required passion, something more needs to be done. For this, there are some principles unknown to most composers. . . . In order to much better justify my purpose in writing this work, I believe it necessary to say something on the diversity of *expression* (sic) produced by music. Either one represents certain passions or one seeks to lead the listener himself to a specific passion. Accordingly, the representations are different, depending upon whether they arise

that the word “lontananza” should be translated as “absence” rather than “departure.” *Bach*, 27–28.—Trans.]

⁸⁸ See *Jahresbericht des G. G. Gymnasiums zu Ohrdruf* (1900).

⁸⁹ Perhaps it is useful to recall here that the violinist J. P. von Westhof lived in Weimar and that his father had served Sweden and had traveled to that country.

from nature or from art. In fact, there are instances in which the listener can immediately discern the composer's intention, even if it is not stated in words: for instance, when one imitates birdsongs like the cuckoo or nightingale, the sound of bells, or the noise of the cannon on some instrument, or the sound of trumpets and kettledrums on the clavier. But it also happens that a composer tends to express himself indirectly by *analogy*, and that he composes in such a way that the music can be compared to the proposed subject by means of some intermediary account. Then a commentary is altogether necessary if one wishes to avoid straying quite severely from this harmony, or, even worse, lapsing into a mute person's discourse that is very little understood by others. Therefore, I represent, in the first sonata, Goliath's stomping and his growling threats through the low theme that resounds arrogantly because of its dotted rhythms,⁹⁰ and I add to it some blatant notes. The flight of the Philistines and their pursuit are described in a fugue of rapid notes, and its voices follow each other hurriedly there. In the third sonata, the loving fiancé, happy yet fearing some misfortune, is depicted by a graceful melody mingled with several odd notes and cadences. Likewise, I have depicted Laban's deception through an unexpected and bewildering modulation that leads from one key to another—what the Italians call “Inganno” (deceptive cadence). Gideon's doubt appears in a series of repeated motifs always a second higher so that we are made to hear the insecurity of the singers, who are accustomed to search for their notes in this uncertain way. . . . As for the sad or joyous passions, music represents them easily and they need not be described in words unless one wants to indicate a specific character—as in these sonatas—so as not to mistake afflicted Hiscias's “Lamento” for either Peter's tearful moan, Jeremiah's laments, or for some other man's grieving.”⁹¹

In Bach's *Capriccio*, the influence of Kuhnau's theories and examples is very recognizable. But the younger composer already shows himself equipped with an abundance of images that he has borrowed from his predecessors. We cannot deny that Kuhnau steers him, but he enriches Kuhnau's vocabulary with a host of phrases taken from every descriptive and touching work by 17th-century masters. To convince ourselves of this, it will be enough for us to hark back to Bach's language sources that I have already pointed out, for there is perfect unity of expressive invention between this instrumental piece and the vocal works through which I have shown Bach's meaningful formulas. Barely twenty years old, he possessed the most characteristic ones, whose power of suggestion had already been proven in the music of older composers before he adopted and reinforced them in his own works. However, it is important to establish, through several typical outward correspondences, the definite hard and fast kinship of this very

⁹⁰ It is the rhythmic motif that Bach uses to express grandeur, pride, and pompous and powerful majesty.

⁹¹ See the edition of clavier works by Kuhnau, published by M. K. Päsler (*Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, Series I, vol. 4, p. 123).

early clavier piece with motifs of the same generally accepted meaning that we find throughout Bach's later works.

Let us consider the first movement. According to the synopsis, it is "a cajoling by his friends, to distract him [Bach's brother] from his journey." The free form of the "arioso" serves well for this affectionate coaxing. It is dominated by the caressing harmony of sixths, as in the tender arias and the beginning of the introduction to the *Actus Tragicus* in which the violas da gamba sing so tenderly of the charm of "God's time."⁹² And this insinuating flattery is embellished by ornaments that, as the French clavierists said, give "some tenderness to the feeling"⁹³ (ex. 10.9a). The undulations of the principal phrase repeat the loving prayer ever more obsessively, and then regrets soon begin showing themselves through a chromatic passage that even evokes the great sorrowful implorations of the cantatas (ex. 10.9b).



Ex. 10.9a. *Capriccio*, BWV 992/1, mm. 1–2.



Ex. 10.9b. *Capriccio*, BWV 992/1, mm. 8–9.

By repeating the motifs, Bach expresses himself with the same insistence as in passages declaimed by the voices on a continually repeated note in the first chorus from the cantata *Bleib bei uns* when it is a matter of translating the disciples' words to Jesus at Emmaus: "Abide with us" (ex. 10.10).⁹⁴

⁹² Cantata *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* (BWV 106/2, mm. 1–6).

⁹³ See the preface to Gigault's organ book: *Livre d'Orgue* (1685), *Arch. des Maîtres de l'Orgue*, ed. Guilmant (Paris: 1902), vol. 4.

⁹⁴ BWV 6/1, mm. 111–113. See chap. 4, pars. 4–6 of this volume.



Ex. 10.10. *Capriccio*, BWV 992/1, mm. 12–15.

The “idea of various accidents that can happen to his brother in foreign lands” consists of a fugal passage whose theme does not have, as one might expect, a very clear descriptive form: the melody unfolds with melancholy and repeats three times, without interruption, a step lower on each repeat. Actually, it is in the continuous subsiding of the undulation that we recognize the characteristic trait of this episode. The music seems to depict a slow collapse, and, in the last measure of the theme, we also find a motif that Bach uses in his cantatas to depict fatigue.⁹⁵ Here is the first statement of this descending sequence (ex. 10.11):



Ex. 10.11. *Capriccio*, BWV 992/2, mm. 1–6.

The third period culminates in a modulation to F minor, but this is not a conclusion. Whereas the upper part repeats the F, the other voices contrive to move while sounding a major chord, then a six-four chord—a chord that the masters of the beginning of the 17th century considered unsettled and bleak—and then the impression of the minor mode is renewed. This sequence of faltering harmonies dissolves into another vague harmony, after which everything remains in suspense without resolving, and it is only after a silence that a formal cadence takes shape in C, the dominant of F minor. This “representation” of the vicissitudes of the coming voyage is therefore less frightening than unsettling. It is dominated by the feeling of the unknown, and the only clear image is one of fatigue. But Bach does not prophesy threats of future dangers. Rather, the lines that he unfolds seem to immerse themselves in faraway mists. Whereas Johann Jakob Froberger, in his *Plainte, faite à Londres, pour passer la mélancolie* (Lament, composed in London

⁹⁵ For example in *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe* (BWV 156/2, mm. 12–15).

for relieving melancholia),⁹⁶ and in an allemande, “faite en passant le Rhin dans une barque en grand péril” (composed while ferrying over the Rhine on a boat in great peril), tried to depict travel experiences—the risks of the waters and roadways—Bach never misuses such descriptions. What preoccupies him more is showing this fellow-feeling that he has experienced beforehand: the same weariness that will overcome the traveler. He already suffers for the soldier musician who is going to submit to the exhausting monotony of the army's marches in formation amidst wagons and pedestrians advancing as far as the eye can see.

At the beginning of the “friends’ general *Lamento*,” Bach’s compassion for his brother’s labors carries him away once more. Through its structure and feeling, this “lamento” recalls the “Passacaglio” form—the solemn dance—that Walther calls “even less animated than the chaconne, with a more languishing melodic line” and “nearly always in the minor mode.”⁹⁷ Moreover, Johann Sebastian chooses a minor tonality here that was deemed very appropriate for sadness: the key of F minor.⁹⁸ The first phrase (ex. 10.12), following the exposition of the basso ostinato that characterizes the passacaglia, is related to the fatigue motif that I pointed out in the preceding passage.



Ex. 10.12. *Capriccio*, BWV 992/3, mm. 5–8.

Some interrupted moans and syncopated sobs appear in the following couplets. Then several chromatic notes groan in the melodic line, and, lastly, the upper line adopts the theme stated in the bass—the series of descending half-steps—by transforming it into an expressive variation of the initial subject. The sad meaning of this chromatic theme has been noted quite often in the course of this study, so it is unnecessary for me to use new examples to demonstrate that it is generally accepted by 17th-century composers who rely on this sequence for their most effective formulas. However, I will recall that Philips, in his *Pavana dolorosa* (1593), uses a form of it,⁹⁹ and that Luigi Rossi—after the chorus “Ah! piangete, ah! lagrimate” (Ah! cry, ah! weep) at the end of the second act of *Orfeo* (1647)—

⁹⁶ Froberger, *Clavierwerke in Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich*, ed. Adler (Vienna: 1897), 12²:110.

⁹⁷ See Johann Gottfried Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig: 1732), for the word *Passacaglio*.

⁹⁸ Mattheson writes that this key perfectly expresses an incurable melancholy in *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg: 1713), 249.

⁹⁹ See Seiffert's article (*J. P. Sweelinck und seine direkten deutschen Schüler*) in the *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musik-wissenschaft* (1891), 163.

writes a “sinfonie” in which the bass begins on a chromatic sequence to represent “Orpheus’s tears at having lost his wife.”¹⁰⁰ Also note that, in the numerous passacaglias constructed on the descending tetrachord, we inevitably meet the chromatic variation.¹⁰¹ Moreover, when Bach reproduces it here in the *Capriccio* he is ingeniously expressive. The theme of tears is reflected in the bass part by separated groups of notes in which he combines the motif of tears and the motif of sighs,¹⁰² and, as the synopsis says, all the voices wail. Toward the end, after a tearful progression,¹⁰³ a descending phrase amplifies the motif of overwhelmed sorrow, whose last notes seem drawn from the motif that we already heard at the lamento’s beginning. In concluding this movement, the bass recalls the ostinato theme of the passacaglia one more time, all mingled with moans and huge sobs.¹⁰⁴

Bach inscribed the fourth movement: “Here come the friends, because they see that it cannot be otherwise, and they bid him goodbye.” Two heavy and imperious cadences verify for us “that it cannot be otherwise” through the example of their inevitable resolution (from the dominant-seventh chord to the tonic). It is the same kind of allusion here in the *Capriccio* as the one contained in the first measures of the bass aria “Es ist vollbracht” (It is finished) from the cantata *Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem*.¹⁰⁵ While forming two concise cadences, the singer repeats these words that proclaim the fulfilling of Christ’s destiny.¹⁰⁶ Here is the passage from the *Capriccio* where the chain of modulations contains something peremptory (ex. 10.13).

¹⁰⁰ Library of the Paris Conservatory (modern copy). I have already pointed out the chromatic motif of tears (exs. 5.21; 5.22; 5.23 and related text). Before Bach, German musicians produced it very often. Zeutschner (1652) evokes Madeleine’s tears with it, and Tunder uses it to represent the sobs of the exiled Israelites (*Gesangwerke*, in *Denkmäler deutsche Tonkunst*, series 1, 3:111). We find the same formula in the introduction to the motet *Weine nicht* by Weckmann (*Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, series 1, vol. 6). Erlebach joins a descending chromatic sequence to the word *Tränen* (tears) in the cantata *Ach, dass ich Wassers genug* (Bibliothek zu Berlin, ms. 5660).

¹⁰¹ Cf. the article by R. Buchmayer (*Drei irrtümlich J. S. Bach zugeschriebene Klavier-Kompositionen*), in the *Sammelbände der I. M. G.*, 2:268.

¹⁰² See exs. 3.42a–d and exs. 5.21, 5.22 in this volume.

¹⁰³ BWV 992/3, mm. 36–42.

¹⁰⁴ These distended motifs recall Kuhnau’s “exorbitantia” (excessive) (Preface to *Musikalische Vorstellung einiger Biblischer Historien*, p. 120).

¹⁰⁵ BWV 159/4, mm. 9–11.

¹⁰⁶ I am referring to the passage by Kuhnau cited above (chap. 10, p. 373, par. 33).



Ex. 10.13. *Capriccio*, BWV 992/4, mm. 1–4.

The next measures depict, through some motifs often used in the cantatas,¹⁰⁷ the friends who, one after the other, come to visit Johann Jakob. The irrevocable decision of the adventurous musician is shown through a sequence of repeated notes, which contradict the harmonies of the other parts, and this scene ends with a brief description of the departure of the friends who go away “as they came” (ex. 10.14).



Ex. 10.14. *Capriccio*, BWV 992/4, mm. 8–11.

The *Aria di Postiglioni* (The coachman's tune) that follows contains an imitative part. The melody sounded by Bach's coachman is not stated without interruption as in the tune that W. Byrd's driver whistles (*The Carman's Whistle*).¹⁰⁸ It is stressed by the cracking of the whip, whose incisive claps also resound through the course of the final fugue “all'imitazione della cornetta di Postiglione” (in imitation of the coachman's cornet). This last movement is quite complex. The fanfare that the postillion plays on his cornet provides its subject, and this theme undoubtedly echoes some familiar call from mail coaches on Thuringian routes. One hundred years later, Madame de Staël—upon coming into Germany after having crossed the Rhine—listened with a kind of anguish to “the postillion's horn, whose shrill and out-of-tune notes seemed to announce a sad

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, the first chorus from *Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen* (BWV 65/1, mm. 9–12).

¹⁰⁸ See Burney (*A General History of Music*, 3:89).

departure toward a sad destination.”¹⁰⁹ Perhaps, in the fugal theme—“in imitation of the cornet”—Bach intends such a characterization when he alters the initial motif in the second measure, as if the cornetist misses the pitch by blowing too hard. But this parody does not detract from the theme’s expressive character. Actually, we do not find it to have this presage of “a sad departure” that so affected Madame de Staël. In fact, the first notes are bright and the rhythm is vigorous. However, Bach does not restrict himself to mimicking the driver’s call, and it is easy for us to detect, in this imperious summons, the fundamental elements of the figures he uses to portray inevitable fate and inflexible divine will. The first notes seem to predict the harsh “So muss es sein!” (So must it be!) from the cantata *Du sollst Gott, deinen Herren, lieben von ganzem Herzen*,¹¹⁰ and the repetition of the same sonorities and the same patterns impose the rigidity on this fugal opening that we noted earlier in the formulas Bach joined to words expressing ideas of obligation and firmness of command or will (ex. 10.15).¹¹¹



Ex. 10.15. *Capriccio*, BWV 992/6, mm. 1–5.

Even in this fugue—whose title promises only a picturesque sketch—Bach reveals himself as inventor of profound symbols. This youthful work gives proof of the marvelous faculty that allows a poet or artist to stir up a whole sequence of ideas through an image. In this composition from his twentieth year, the trait already shines forth that, for Goethe, proclaims his genius:¹¹² the intuition for showing the general idea contained in each individual image. Here the coarse postillion wears the badge of Fate, so to speak, and his cracked trumpet notes communicate destiny’s stark message. Rest assured that, in the jolting caper which he depicts so clearly during this fugue, Bach believed we could perceive—through the way the fugue’s course is ordered—the very rolling of time’s chariot in its merciless flight full of bumps and haste. Explained according to the lexicon of his metaphors, this page by the young composer is extraordinarily amplified. Beneath some quasi-comical guises, he entertains one of the subjects familiar to his somber soul. He retraces life’s voyage, knowing full well that a threatening and implacable force steers it, and we must not doubt that this representation prevails over

¹⁰⁹ De Staël, *De l’Allemagne* (1813), chap. 13.

¹¹⁰ BWV 77/2, m. 1. This motif is cited in ex. 1.37 in this volume.

¹¹¹ See ex. 2.6a, b and preceding text.

¹¹² Cited by Henri Lichtenberger in *Richard Wagner, Poète et Penseur* (Paris: 1898).

everything else. Moreover, observe that—in the forty-fifth measure, and in the following measures—the fugue's minor modulation is prepared by the distress motifs. They appear in a phrase of typical rhythm in which the snappings of the whip, organized in a continual sequence, suggest the idea of fierce scourging.¹¹³ The groaning diminished fourth¹¹⁴ precedes the wailing of the chromatic notes evoked so furtively by the bass. And, after the episode in minor, the conclusion comes abruptly, without even stating the entire theme one last time, for, in this culmination, all ideas of imitation have disappeared from Bach's mind. He deprives himself of renewing the grimace of the out-of-tune cornet and of recalling the character of the postillion, and he plays it out with this terrifying visage that early painters give to Death—the lashing and spurring horseman of our lives.¹¹⁵ But it is the hammering motif of destiny that he lays out at the expense of the pictorial motif, just as he makes use of the "whip motif" to predict, through a heavily sinking sequence of notes, the final fall into the uncertain abyss.¹¹⁶

* * *

Pieces in which Meaning is Determined by the Motifs or by the Harmonies

As we see throughout our analysis, description of inward states predominates in Bach's portrayals. The "gestures" in the music are connected to ideas and feelings, rather than to scenes, and these gestures never lack meaning. For Bach, as for Mattheson, "instrumental music is nothing other than a language ("Ton-Sprache"), or a discourse in sounds ("Klang-Rede"), and it must always have as its inherent goal the provocation of a definite movement in the soul. For arousing this emotion, we must be aware of the power of the impression ("Nachdruck") embedded in the intervals, in the careful division of the pieces, in the well-ordered progression, etc."¹¹⁷ We have already recognized the application of this theory in the music composed for the cantatas, in pieces based upon the chorales, or in works clarified by a synopsis, but it remains to be demonstrated how Johann Sebastian maintains the same intent to speak to us and touch us in compositions that are free from all verbal allusion—and that he achieves this by the same means.

¹¹³ See the compositions for the "Passion."

¹¹⁴ I refer the reader to exs. 2.41a, b and exs. 2.42a–c and their related text.

¹¹⁵ I refer to the engraving by A. Dürer: *Ritter, Tod und Teufel* and to Holbein's *Danse des Morts*, the plowman and Death.

¹¹⁶ See three measures before the end, and compare the motifs in the middle parts and the successive descents of octaves in the last measure with examples 5.1a–c that I have cited in this volume.

¹¹⁷ Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 82.

Without repeating the meticulous work for the instrumental pieces that I have carried out for the cantatas, I will try to show, through several examples, to what degree Bach's expressive will manifests itself in these works that lack any literary dependence whatsoever.

Therefore, in his F-minor *Invention* [*Sinfonia*—Trans.], the pain motifs reappear that we observed in the "Lamento" from the caprice on the departure of Johann Jacob, and it is useful to observe that the *Invention* is even in the same key.¹¹⁸ The theme of sadness and the theme of sighs are stated simultaneously at the beginning (ex. 10.16).



Ex. 10.16. *Sinfonia* 9 in F minor, BWV 795, mm. 1–3.

Next, we hear a series of huge moans in the bass part (ex. 10.17).¹¹⁹



Ex. 10.17. *Sinfonia* 9 in F minor, BWV 795, mm. 3–5.

These three subjects combine to form the F-minor *Invention*. The moans are only interrupted in two measures—but not to make a truce with the tearful notes, for this brief episode expresses renewed sobbing. And when Bach modifies the designs of the themes he presented at the beginning it is only to heighten the painful stress.

In the *Chromatic Fantasy*,¹²⁰ the motif of sighs enters after the unruly passages that tell us of the passionate soul's questions and restlessness, its tumultuous thoughts, and its delirium. The swirling drapery of the recitatives

¹¹⁸ Again, Bach has used F minor and a chromatic basso ostinato for composing the first chorus in the cantata *Weinen, Klagen* (BWV 12/2, m. 1–8 et seq.).

¹¹⁹ BWV 795. See the significant examples in which Bach uses the diminished third (BWV 827/1, mm. 69 and 118) and intervals of the ninth (BWV 826/1, mm. ?; /2, mm. ?). [Pirro gives *Gesellschaft* page 59 of the *Sinfonia* and page 60 of the *Allemande* from Bach's C-minor *Partita* as the source for these ninths, but none of them appear there either as consecutive melodic intervals or in individual chords.—Trans.]

¹²⁰ BWV 903, mm. 50–53, 59–60.

reconnects—after each desperate flourish—with these two slow notes in which all the sadness of vain soaring and misled desire is concentrated. In the last period, this two-note chromatic scale mingled with very troubled exclamations relies entirely on this rhythmic motif. Here is the beginning of the phrase (ex. 10.18):



Ex. 10.18. *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D minor*, BWV 903/1, mm. 73–74.

If we disregard for a moment the ornamental—though expressive—figures that Bach adds to this descending sequence, we recognize the melodic patterns from the cantatas that he joins to the words “Have pity on me”¹²¹ and “Patience, patience, my heart.”¹²²

The fugue following the *Chromatic Fantasy* is of a very different character. While the descending chromatic theme and the rhythmic formula of sighs and collapse have joined forces in the *Fantasy*, in the fugue Bach links the ascending chromatic theme to the rhythmic motif of joy. This theme lightens with considerable license in the response (ex. 10.19).



Ex. 10.19. *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D minor*, BWV 903/2, mm. 1–12.

This is the counterpart of the *Fantasy*: only strains of tenderness remain in the chromatic sequence. The work therefore has the same constitution as certain

¹²¹ Cantata *Du wahrer Gott und Davids Sohn* (BWV 23/1, mm. 51–54).

¹²² Cantata *Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid II* (BWV 58/1, mm. 21–25). I recall that the word *Geduld* (patience) is translated by the same rhythmic element in the cantata *Ich hab in Gottes Herze und Sinn* (BWV 92/5, mm. 14–16) and that the same broken-up chromatic sequence is joined to words of desolation in the second aria from the cantata *Vergnügte Ruh* (BWV 170/3, mm. 15–16, 32–33, 52–53).

cantatas in which words of consolation and promises of salvation follow desperate prayers and fevered anguish.¹²³

The prelude and fugue in B minor from part one of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*¹²⁴ also express diverse feelings. But these two pieces link up more directly than those we have just been examining. Indeed, if the fugue following the chromatic fantasy develops joyfully, this softening of sorrow that Bach has depicted so intensely at first, seems to come from without: the music calms the soul, but it never represents the soul calmed. On the contrary, in the B-minor prelude and fugue, the music shows us a definite progression of feeling: melancholy in the prelude, it gets aggravated, and then becomes painful and penetrating in the fugue. The last six measures of the prelude are already troubling. The bass line, which flows in a united course like a slow stream, suddenly wails, while the other two voices repeat the motifs we also meet joined to the words “Let him be crucified” in the *St. Matthew Passion* (ex. 10.20).¹²⁵



Ex. 10.20. *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, “Prelude XXIV in B minor,”
BWV 869/1, mm. 42–47.

As if in a reverie alongside a river’s steady and monotonous murmur—darkening little by little and ending in sadness—the languor of the prelude, with its steady rhythm, therefore resolves in distress. The fugue that follows is only an expansion of the accumulation of this bitterness that bursts forth in the last phrases of the prelude. Moreover, Philipp Spitta—who has not noticed this connection between the prelude and the fugue—nevertheless characterizes this last idea with a

¹²³ Notice also the fluid interludes in which very bright passages dominate. Bach sometimes mixes such episodes with scenes of sadness when he doesn’t want to paint them as despairing. For example, see the interludes from the fugue in B minor, cited further on.

¹²⁴ BWV 869/1, /2.

¹²⁵ See exs. 2.40a–c and preceding text.

great deal of accuracy: "It evolves slowly, moaning, with features that are bitter and sunken with sadness on a road that seems endless. This piece is included in the same category of feeling as the F-minor *Sinfonia* analyzed above, but the expression of pain is driven to such a point here that it seems nearly intolerable" (ex. 10.21).¹²⁶



Ex. 10.21. *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, "Fugue XXIV in B minor," BWV 869/2, mm. 1-4.

In his picturesque style, Spitta describes the theme from this fugue as a figure wandering in desolation, and we can recognize a motif in it that we can consider to be a variation of the descending and ascending chromatic motif. The formula of sighs is found here again as well in the groups of neighboring notes linked in twos. The verse from the German *Magnificat* that sings of God's mercifulness for his servant Israel contains an analogous motif, but only in one direction. In the cantata *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren* Bach also recalls both the plea and the misfortune of God's servant, while the text evokes God's pity (ex. 10.22).



Ex. 10.22. *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren*, BWV 10/5, mm. 1-5.

When it is a matter of Jesus's humility and poverty in the alto aria from the cantata *Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kommt*¹²⁷ a melodic sequence similar to this last one appears in the accompaniment.

It is fitting here to observe that the counter-subject of the great fugue for organ in E minor has the same character as the themes we have been examining. Moreover, this noble and doleful phrase (ex. 10.23b) joins up with a motif based on the descending chromatic theme (ex. 10.23a).

¹²⁶ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:782.

¹²⁷ BWV 151/3, mm. 12-17.



Ex. 10.23a & b. *Prelude and Fugue in E minor for Organ*,
BWV 548/2, mm. 1–2, 6–7.

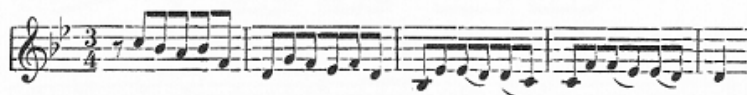
Defined in this way by the character of its motifs,¹²⁸ this fugue connects wonderfully with the prelude, whose first measures are enough for me to point out (ex. 10.24):



Ex. 10.24. *Prelude and Fugue in E minor for Organ*, BWV 548/1, mm. 1–5.

After a lively prelude in which the motifs whirl about, rejoin, and flee from each other, and in which the voices answer each other from one end of the keyboard to the other as in a game, the B-flat major fugue in the second part of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* is composed on a theme of weariness. We might say that Bach wanted at first to portray children who are chasing, hiding from, and calling to each other and answering their echoes deep in the forest. Then, all tired out, they settle down . . . (ex. 10.25),

¹²⁸ I recall that the motif formed by the alternating voices in the duo for soprano and alto from the cantata *Christ lag in Todes Banden* (BWV 4/3, mm. 2–6 et seq.) is of the same form as the counter-subject of this fugue. In the E-minor organ prelude, the same groaning sequence is well laid out (BWV 533/1, mm. 11–22), and we find it again in a variation from the F-minor fugue in the first part of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (BWV 857/2, mm. 16–22).



Ex. 10.25. *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, "Fugue XXI in B-flat major,"
BWV 890/2, mm. 1–5.

... and go to sleep (ex. 10.26).



Ex. 10.26. *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, "Fugue XXI in B-flat major,"
BWV 890/2, mm. 98–101.

In the themes from the A-flat major prelude (ex. 10.27a) and fugue (ex. 10.27b), it is easy to distinguish an expression of good humor and peace (part one of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*):



Ex. 10.27a. *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, "Prelude XVII in A-flat major,"
BWV 862/1, mm. 1–3.



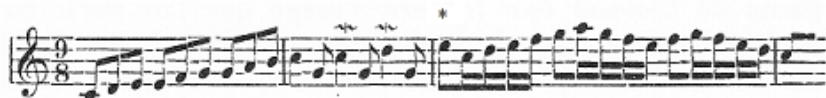
Ex. 10.27b. *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, "Fugue XVII in A-flat major,"
BWV 862/2, mm. 1–2.

In the C-major organ prelude (9/8), in the 24th Goldberg variation,¹²⁹ and in the "Gigue" from the fourth *French Suite*,¹³⁰ we encounter the cheerful motif that serves in the *Orgel-Büchlein* as commentary on the choral *Wir Christenleut!*

¹²⁹ BWV 988/25, mm. 5–19.

¹³⁰ BWV 815/6, mm. 19–26, 57–60.

(We Christians, we are now filled with joy, because Christ is born as man for our consolation).¹³¹ Here is this motif as it occurs in the third measure* of the organ prelude (ex. 10.28).



Ex. 10.28. *Prelude and Fugue in C major for Organ*, BWV 547/1, mm. 1–4 [motif taken from mm. 3–4].

We should note that in none of the pieces I am mentioning does this motif have the principal role and that it intervenes only for enlivening the composition.

To complete this study of the meaning of the themes in Bach's instrumental pieces, I would need to repeat all that I have said in the preceding chapters. So, I can only refer the reader to the examples that I have already given.

However, I will point out once more the fugue from the C-minor *Toccata* for clavier, with its obstinate and imperious theme,¹³² and the D-major organ fugue, whose subject is akin to the “battle” motifs that I cited earlier.¹³³ In part one of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, I must note that the C-minor fugue contains the ascending chromatic motif and the “motif of sighs”¹³⁴; that the C-sharp major fugue includes the rhythmic and melodic motifs of joy¹³⁵; that the C-sharp minor fugue is built on the crucifixion motif,¹³⁶ with the theme of fate appearing in measure 49; that we find in the F-sharp major fugue¹³⁷—whose subject, moreover, expands with ease—a joyously cadenced phrase of the same demeanor as the phrases employed in the exultant tenor aria from the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*¹³⁸ and in the first chorus from the cantata *Lasst uns sorgen, lasst uns wachen*¹³⁹; and that the laborious, repeated eighth-note rhythm is linked to the ascending efforts of the melodic line in the F-sharp minor fugue.¹⁴⁰ In part two of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, we should also note the use Bach makes of the broken motif in the F-minor prelude¹⁴¹; the brightness of the patterns in the A-major prelude¹⁴²; and the

¹³¹ BWV 612, mm. 1–3 et seq.

¹³² BWV 911, mm. 33–38 et seq.

¹³³ BWV 532/2, mm. 1–2.

¹³⁴ BWV 849/2, mm. 18–20.

¹³⁵ BWV 848/2, mm. 11–7.

¹³⁶ BWV 849/2, mm. 1–3.

¹³⁷ BWV 858/2, mm. 1–6.

¹³⁸ BWV 21/10, mm. 7–27 et seq.

¹³⁹ BWV 213/1, mm. 1–8 et seq.

¹⁴⁰ BWV 859/2, mm. 5–4, 7–8.

¹⁴¹ BWV 881/1, mm. 1–5 et seq.

¹⁴² BWV 888/1, mm. 1–6 et seq.

repetition of melodic sixths in the F-sharp major fugue,¹⁴³ similar to the sixths joined to words of joyfulness.¹⁴⁴ Lastly, in the D-minor prelude from part one¹⁴⁵ and in the A-minor prelude and fugue from part two of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Bach composes a tumultuous and somber music that speaks of tempests and despair.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ BWV 883/2, mm. 24–32.

¹⁴⁴ See exs. 2.12a–c and preceding text.

¹⁴⁵ BWV 851/1, mm. 1–6.

¹⁴⁶ BWV 889/1, mm. 1–5 et seq.; /2, mm. 1–6 et seq.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BACH AND EARLY MUSIC – BACH AND FOREIGN MUSIC

16th-century compositions. – Works of the Italian masters. – French music. – Acquaintance with these works useful for studying the formation of Bach's expressive language.

16th-century Compositions

“At the age of eight, when he had the chance to sneak into the library of the house, the child often hid there for the whole day. Barely speaking Latin, he sometimes seized, or sometimes rejected, the books that he could reach, and, opening and closing them at random, he skimmed a few pages, or pressed on, according to whether the clarity of the discourse or the agreeableness of the subject tempted him. We might have said that chance served him as tutor, and that he imagined himself to understand the famous dictum: ‘Take and read’ He happened to come upon the works of antiquity first, of which he understood nothing in the beginning, then, unwittingly, something, and finally, as much as was necessary. And, just as those who stroll in the sun are tanned by its rays even if it is not their wish, he thus received some coloring not only from the language, but also from the thoughts”¹

¹ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *God. Guil. Leibnitii Opera philosophica*, ed. J. Erdmann (Berlin: 1840), 91.

I find a curious resemblance between Leibniz's first studies (recalled by Leibniz himself in these lines) and Bach's first studies. Both men were guided by fate and stimulated by their impatience to know. A little older than Leibniz, Bach had been taken in, after his parents' deaths, by his older brother, Johann Christoph, organist at Ohrdruf. Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach and Johann Friedrich Agricola tell us that Johann Sebastian's ardor was such that he soon knew perfectly all the pieces that his brother very much wanted him to learn. And they add this characteristic anecdote, whose telling I regard as a little ingenuous: "However, a book that his brother possessed that was filled with clavier pieces by the most celebrated masters of the time—Froberger, Kerl, Pachelbel—had been refused him, one knew not for what reason, in spite of all his entreaties. His zeal to go ever further inspired him with this innocent strategy: the book was locked in a cabinet with a latticed door; and since it was only bound in paper he could reach through the grill-work with his small hands and roll it up while it was still inside the cabinet. He took it out this way at night when everyone was asleep, and he copied it by the light of the moon, for he had no other light there. After six months, this musical quarry was successfully in his hands, but he was very careful only to take it out in secret until. However, to his great chagrin, his brother found out about it and mercilessly took away this copy that he had so painstakingly made. Imagine a miser, on his way from Peru, losing his chest with a hundred thousand thalers, and you will have quite a vivid idea of little Johann Sebastian's disappointment at this loss."²

Avid and patient like Leibniz, Bach differs from him, however, in this pursuit of books. The works in which Bach engrossed himself—not satisfied with merely reading them—are not, strictly speaking, ancient ones. Johann Jakob Froberger had, in fact, died in 1667,³ but at the end of the century his compositions still seemed quite modern for being published in 1693, at Mayence, under the laudatory title *Diverse ingegnossissime, rarissime e non mai piu viste curiose Partite, di Toccate, Canzoni, Ricercate, Alemande, Correnti, Sarabande e Gige, di Cembali, Organi e Stromenti del Eccellentissimo et Famosissimo Organista Giovanni Giacomo Froberger*. Johann Kaspar Kerl lived until 1693,⁴ and Johann Pachelbel was actually still living. He was Bach's friend and had been godfather to

² This passage is taken from the obituary contained in the 4th volume of Mizler's *Musikalische Bibliothek* (1754), part 1, 158 et seq.

³ Born in the first years of the 17th century in Halle, Froberger, court organist at Vienna, went to study with Frescobaldi in 1637, stayed in Vienna from 1641 to 1645, traveled until 1649, resumed his post, then, passing through Dresden, was at Brussels in 1650, in Paris in 1657, traveled to Vienna again, passing through England, and finally retired close to Duchess Sibylle de Montbéliard. He died at Héricourt in 1667.

⁴ Son of a Saxon organist, Kerl was born in 1627, sang in the Vienna boys' choir, was the pupil of Carissimi in Rome, Kapellmeister to the elector of Bavaria in 1656, and organist at the Vienna cathedral in 1674. Then, from 1680, he lived on for some time at the court in Munich where he died in 1693.

one of Johann Sebastian's sisters, Johanna Juditha, born in 1680, as well as teacher of Johann Christoph Bach in Erfurt—the same one who had so brashly snatched from his little brother the musical treasure acquired during sleepless nights. Perhaps Johann Sebastian even heard Pachelbel when this master resided in Gotha (1692–95) before accepting the post as organist at Saint Sebaldus church in Nuremberg where he remained until his death (1706). But if Bach did not seek out the complete works of those that we would call, in music history, the “old masters,” it is undoubtedly because he already knew them and practiced them daily. Seventeenth-century German scholars had not abandoned the tradition of this “pictorial music” from the 16th century, in which each voice, free and tuneful, completes the chorus of other voices without ever seeming to depend on them. And, in all of Germany, Thuringian children were renowned for the best singing of the old motets.⁵ Through these complex pieces, they learned how to maintain steadfast pitch and tempo and to vocalize clearly, and they became especially accustomed to the contrapuntal play that they brought to life, therefore the musical “scripture” became, we might say, natural to them, and, simply through practice, they fashioned themselves into ingenious weavers of notes. During the time at the Ohrdruf school when Bach suffered “intolerable discipline” from cantor Johann Heinrich Arnold (1653–98)—“poet laureate,” but negligent tutor, “Godless man” and “scandal of the church”—it is likely that he familiarized himself with this supple and lofty art. In 1729, when he bought the *Florilegium Portense* for his pupils at Saint Thomas's school in Leipzig, he undoubtedly thought that he would renew for their benefit the blessings he had received in his childhood from the masters whose works Erhard Bodenschatz had assembled in 1603 for the pupils at the Pforta gymnasium. This collection appeared in the St. Michael's school library at Lüneburg, where Bach had been admitted on 15 March 1700 when he had to leave Ohrdruf “ob defectum hospitiorum” (due to a lack of lodgings).⁶ The *Florilegium* is, in fact, mentioned in the catalog of works transferred after cantor Friedrich Emanuel Praetorius's death to his successor, August Braun (1696).⁷ It seems, according to the information that Joachim Praetorius gave in drawing up this list, that it is the second edition, from 1618, that the school possessed. We

⁵ “I hand over the ‘motet’ rendering to the Thuringian peasants,” we read in part three of Niedt's *Musicalische Handleitung*, ed. Mattheson (Hamburg: 1717). The Thuringian children's choir was famous: see Philipp Spitta, *J. S. Bach* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1873), 1:186.

⁶ I have taken this information from the excellent study by Dr. Friedrich Thomas, professor at the Ohrdruf gymnasium: “Einige Ergebnisse über Johann Sebastian Bachs Ohrdruffer Schulzeit.” And I direct all my thanks to Dr. Langer, director of the gymnasium, who, on my passing through Ohrdruf, told me about this work, published in the *Jahresbericht des Gräfllich Gleichenschen Gymnasiums . . . zu Ohrdruf* (Ohrdruf: 1900).

⁷ Consult the *Programm des Johanneums zu Lüneburg* (1870), where W. Junghans brought out the article entitled *J. S. Bach als Schüler der Partikularschule zu St. Michaelis in Lüneburg* (Lüneburg: 1870).

notice some famous names among the composers of the “Cantiones” edited in these volumes. Among the Italians, we find Ingegneri, whose motets were thought for a long time to be by Palestrina;⁸ Luca Marenzio, the expressive master who rejects the narrow discipline of the modes by moving through unheard-of modulations;⁹ Ruggiero Giovanelli, successor to Palestrina at Saint Peter’s in Rome;¹⁰ Ludovico Viadana;¹¹ the Venetian, Andrea Gabrieli (1585), of whom Heinrich Schütz was a pupil; Claudio Merulo (1533–1604);¹² Tiburzio Massaino (died after 1609), etc. Among the Germans, we see Jacobus Gallus (Jakob Handl, who died in Prague in 1591)¹³ and whose devotional *Ecce quomodo moritur justus* (Behold how the righteous dies) was also combined, by Johann Kuhnau, with the music for the Passion that he performed in Leipzig in 1721;¹⁴ a tuneful and splendid composer, Hans Leo Hassler (died in 1612);¹⁵ Adam Gumpeltzheimer, who has left us some precepts as well as some examples;¹⁶ Christian Erbach, certain of whose motets are worthy of Giovanni Gabrieli; the Thuringian Freidrich Weissensee;¹⁷ Melchior Vulpus, cantor at Weimar;¹⁸ Melchior Franck (died in 1639); Valentin Haussmann;¹⁹ etc. Lastly, dominating all the schools, Orlando di Lasso was represented in this collection by several of his powerful and compassionate works.

In Abraham Schadaeus’s *Promptuarium musicum*—also used at St. Michael’s school—we should cite Palestrina, Francesco Soriano, Nanino, Gregor Aichinger, Orazio Vecchi, Paolo Quagliati, along with several masters included in Bodenschatz’s *Florilegium*.²⁰

Even in the works of several more recent composers, the young Bach could still find the reflection of this great 16th-century music: pliant and moving like Orlando’s, or sumptuous like the Venetians’. Heinrich Schütz’s pupil, Johann

⁸ See Brenet’s study on Palestrina (1906).

⁹ Died in 1599.

¹⁰ He died after 1605.

¹¹ I refer readers to the study published on Viadana in the *Kirchenmusikalisches Jahrbuch* by Haberl (1889).

¹² On these masters, see the ever useful work by Winterfeld, *J. Gabrieli und sein Zeitalter* (Berlin: 1834).

¹³ See *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich*.

¹⁴ Philipp Spitta, *J. S. Bach* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1880), 2:320.

¹⁵ See *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst* (1894), vol. 2.

¹⁶ He died in 1624.

¹⁷ See August Wilhelm Ambros’s *Geschichte der Musik* (1862–82), 3:560.

¹⁸ Died in 1616.

¹⁹ I refer readers to the modern editions of several of these masters (*Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*) and to the studies by several others among them appearing in the publications by the *I. M. G.*

²⁰ I can only refer readers here to the biographical dictionaries, and in particular to the *Quellen-Lexikon* (Leipzig: 1900–04) by Robert Eitner, in which we find, in spite of rather numerous errors, definite information sufficient for orienting our research.

Jakob Löwe—who was born at Eisenach like Johann Sebastian and was organist at Lüneburg²¹—recommended that young composers study compositions written in contrapuntal style,²² and, for the students at Leipzig’s St. Thomas’s school, he published some pieces in strict form in his *Musicalia ad chorum sacrum* (1648), which was also purchased by F. E. Praetorius for his singers. Furthermore, the very same Schütz, the “father of German music”—listen to his recitatives—had requested his pupil, Christoph Bernhard, to prepare, for his funeral, a six-part chorus composed in the style of Palestrina. In 1670, Schütz joyously received this work, in which he saw “not one note to change.”²³ Three years later, Christoph Bernhard praised the chaste majesty and the perfect appropriateness for the church of the masses edited by Johann Theile, “juxta veterum contrapuncti stylum” (according to the old style of counterpoint).²⁴ Thus, through the entire century in Germany, we follow the continuation of Palestrinian art, which was not yet in need of a revival. The young Bach undoubtedly knew these efforts by Bernhard and Theile, whose works had been acquired by the Kapellmeisters at Lüneburg.²⁵

As organist at the “new church” in Arnstadt, Johann Sebastian had the opportunity to complete his study of polyphonic composition without great difficulty and with complete knowledge of the subject. A collection of 16th-century music was preserved there at the Church of Our Lady, a portion of which had been donated by Count Gunther “the pugnacious.” Perhaps Heinrich Bach, Johann Sebastian’s great uncle and organist at this church from 1641 to 1692, had already put to good use the priceless teachings of the enduring art that still lavishes upon those who know how to examine, humbly and at length, the great illuminators of the Holy Word. Undoubtedly, the young organist of the new church had been allowed to consult, in the church library, the oracles in these ancient books, from which one learns to speak the prophets’ language. I have reviewed, outside the old grill-enclosed cabinets, these folios that merit so much respect,²⁶ and I found there the names of Bach’s most illustrious and distant ancestors: in the *Liber selectarum Cantionum quas vulgo Mutetas appellant* (Book of selected songs whose names commonly change), published in 1520 in Augsburg by Grimm and Wyrnung, we find Josquin Desprez,²⁷ Heinrich Isaac, Jean Mouton, Jacobus Obrecht, Pierre de la

²¹ Junghans, *J. S. Bach als Schüler der Partikularschule zu St. Michaelis in Lüneburg*.

²² Löwe, Preface to the *Musicalia ad chorum sacrum* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1648), vol. 8 of the modern edition.

²³ Moritz Fürstenau, *Zur Geschichte der Musik und des Theaters am Hofe zu Dresden* (1861 and 1862), 242.

²⁴ Theile, *Pars prima Missarum 4 et 5 vocum pro pleno choro cum et sine Basso continuo, juxta veterum contrapuncti stylum* (Leipzig: 1673).

²⁵ Junghans, *J. S. Bach als Schüler*, 28, 29.

²⁶ It pleases me to express here all my gratitude to Pastor Weise, who facilitated my research in this library in which is also found, preserved and enriched by his care, an admirable collection of Luther’s writings in original editions.

²⁷ [Also: des Prés, de Près, Després, De Pres, des Prez.—Trans.]

Rue, and Ludwig Senfl. The oldest of all was Obrecht (1430–1507)—an ingenious craftsman who brought multiple blossoms to light on the slender stem of plain-chant motifs—who groups the voices in full harmonies. One of the first pieces contained in this book is a splendid five-voice motet by Johannes Okeghem,²⁸ *Salve crux arbor vitae* (Hail the cross, tree of life) that combines magnificence with a slightly harsh and encumbered majesty. In his history of music,²⁹ A. W. Ambros considers this piece to be “a gigantic gothic cathedral built out of notes.” He admires the alternation of the two-voice episodes with the brief responses by the full choir in its second part, and he marvels at the contrast of this solemn and plain second part with the sumptuous first and third parts that are full of fire. The motets by Josquin are quite numerous in this collection, through which Bach, perhaps, sought to prove how true Martin Luther’s words were when Luther spoke of the composer to Louis XII: “Josquin is the master of notes: they must do what he wishes, while other composers do only what the notes wish” and: “His melodies rise up freely like the songs of finches.” In this anthology, we find the motets for six voices *Praeter rerum seriem* (In addition to the chain), of which a remarkable cantus firmus binds and supports the fabric embroidered with short mysterious motifs; *O Virgo prudentissima* (O Virgin, most prudent) is full of contrasts and concludes with a bounteous outpouring of voices; and *Benedicta es coelorum regina* (Blessed is the queen of the heavens), in which we are beguiled by the freshness of a duet after being dazzled by the noble beginning. Among the pieces for five voices, we find, again by Josquin, his sparsely written and somewhat measured *Inviolata* (Inviolable); his *Miserere* (Have mercy), whose uniform and intense moan Charles Bordes has revived;³⁰ and his *Stabat Mater* (His mother stood weeping), a work of tender piety,³¹ and a somber *De profundis* (Out of the depths) in four voices completes the selection of Josquin’s works. Thus we see all the vigor and diversity of his expressive genius through this choice of compositions. We can establish from these at what point, as Commer very rightly says, Josquin knows how “to impart fully the meaning of the text,”³² and Ambros adds how Josquin also manages to bring to light details indicated by the words.³³ Bach could detect in Josquin the dominant traits of his own character: freedom and power of style, at the service of a profound sensitivity.

Five motets by Heinrich Isaac³⁴ are included in the *Liber selectarum Canticorum*. Two liturgical themes, “Da Pacem” (Give peace) and “Sacerdos et

²⁸ See the study by Brenet (*Soc. de l’Hist. de Paris*, 1893).

²⁹ Ambros, *Geschichte der Musik*, 3:185.

³⁰ Bordes, *Anthologie des maîtres religieux primitives des Xve., Wive et XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Schola Cantorum, ca. 1900), vol. 1, first motet.

³¹ Published in Ambros’s musical supplement to the *Geschichte der Musik* by Otto Kade (vol. 5, p. 62).

³² Preface to vol. 8 of *Collectio musicarum Batavorum*.

³³ Ambros, *Geschichte der Musik*, 3:208.

³⁴ Cf. Ambros, *Geschichte der Musik*, 3:389.

pontifex" (High priest), together serve as foundations to the imposing six-part motet *Optime pastor* (Finest shepherd), whose conclusion is radiant. The composition based on *Virgo prudentissima* has an equally strong structure.³⁵ In these two motets, Isaac lays out some broad sonorous passages just as he wishes, which allows him to strike some great harmonic blows after the subtly crafted passages. In his motets for four voices— *Virgo prudentissima* (Hail Mary most holy), *Prophetarum maxime* (Greatest prophets), and *O Maria, mater Christi* (O Mary, mother of Christ)—the same qualities of construction and finesse are manifest. Lastly, in the same book, we should note several motets by Isaac's pupil, Ludwig Senfl,³⁶ and, having presided over the forming of the collection himself, Senfl must have chosen those pieces from among his own works that seemed the most beautiful to him.

The Arnstadt church library possesses the volume of masses by Francisco Guerrero edited by Nicolas du Chemin in 1566.³⁷ Also found there are the masses by Alard du Gaucquier³⁸ that Christophe Plantin published in 1581, as well as the mass for six voices *Benedicta es* (Blessed art thou) by Philippe de Monte,³⁹ produced by the same printer in 1579. We also see in the library the eight masses written by Georges de la Hèle,⁴⁰ based on motets by Cyprien de Rore, Josquin, Thomas Crecquillon, and Orlando di Lasso (1578). Lastly, Orlando di Lasso is represented in this collection of 16th-century music by his *Magnificat quatuor, quinque, et sex vocibus, ad imitationem cantilenarum quarundam singulari concentus hilaritate excellentium* (Munich: Adam Berg, 1587).

Such were the works that Bach could examine during his spare time from duties as organist at Arnstadt.⁴¹ Did he study these pieces closely enough to benefit from them—which could only be done by transcribing them directly from the individual parts that compose them? We cannot allow ourselves to answer with certainty. However, we may note that, in the town of Arnstadt, there perhaps still was, more than elsewhere, a liking for older music. In 1664, a certain Elias Walther of Arnstadt wrote a dissertation on Orlando di Lasso's motet *In me transierunt dolores mortis* (The pain of death hath come upon me),⁴² also mentioned by

³⁵ See the motets by Isaac in Ambros's *Geschichte der Music* supplement cited above, 5:305, 314, etc.

³⁶ Died around 1555.

³⁷ Guerrero, *Liber primus Missarum* (Paris: Nicolas du Chemin, 1566).

³⁸ Du Gaucquier, *Quatuor Missae V, VI, and VIII vocum, auctore Alardo Nucco* in Guerrero's *Liber primus Missarum*.

³⁹ He died in 1663 in Prague.

⁴⁰ He was then Capellmeister at Tournai.

⁴¹ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1.

⁴² It is found in the Dresden Royal Library; a modern copy of it is kept in the Berlin Royal Library.

Keppler⁴³ and Mersenne.⁴⁴ We also know that, in this town, there was the custom of singing in church “in pictorial style.”⁴⁵

Whether as a child chorister at Ohrdruf and Lüneburg or as choirmaster at Arnstadt, it is evident that Bach experienced the music of 16th-century masters. We must not fail to acknowledge that, on the whole, he has a conception of polyphony quite similar to theirs. “Never,” writes Forkel, “will we meet in his works, or in those of one of his pupils, a confusion in the combining of parts, a note found belonging to the tenor cast into the contralto part, and vice versa; we will not find there the ill-timed and unexpected appearance of several notes suddenly increasing the number of parts, only to vanish just as suddenly afterwards without reconnecting to the composition as a whole He considered the musical voices as if they were people forming a closed community, who conversed among themselves. What if there were only three? One could sometimes remain silent and listen to the others until he wished to comment on the subject. If several alien notes without a motif are mixed with the conversation, Bach deemed that this intervention produced great disorder, and he informed his pupils that it was inadmissible.”⁴⁶ Since Bach’s two oldest sons, especially Carl Philipp Emmanuel, were Forkel’s friends, his remarks have great value because we know him to be so familiar with Bach’s style and with the works by the contrapuntal masters—for Forkel had worked a long time to score masses and motets by Josquin, Obrecht, Okeghem, and other “old masters.”⁴⁷ Moreover, it is very likely that Bach was in the habit of getting his pupils to understand the ease and continuity he demanded of them—when they wrote in several voices—by likening this well-regulated dialog of voices to the balanced and coherent conversation of “well-bred people.” But even this comparison that is so justly applied to the colloquy of melodic lines that answer each other, converse with a common purpose, remain quiet so that others may speak in their turn or join in with a murmur of assent—a comparison that relates so well to the allegorical turn of Bach’s mind—is one that comes from the early masters. Pedro Cerone already specifies this in the thirteenth book (chap. 44) of his treatise on music theory and practice, *El Melopeo* (1613), in which he explains the principles of counterpoint according to the works of 16th-century composers. For him, the four voices must support each other with a kind of courtesy—speaking when necessary, and remaining appropriately silent, like four “hombres de buena razon” (men of good reason).⁴⁸

⁴³ Keppler, *Joannis Keppleri Harmonices mundi libri V* (1619), 75.

⁴⁴ Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle* (Paris, 1636).

⁴⁵ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:313.

⁴⁶ Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *Ueber J. S. Bachs Leben. Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig: 1892), 40. I have summarized the passage.

⁴⁷ The plates of the prepared work would disappear during the French invasion (1806). The ms. is preserved in the Brussels royal library.

⁴⁸ Cerone, *El Melopeo e Maestro* (Naples: 1613), 739.

Representing each voice as a character in this way—knowing how to place the interlocutors on stage, direct them, hold them in one's grasp like a docile troupe that performs with perfect timing, coming together, separating and opposing when necessary—is to possess to the highest degree what Hiller⁴⁹ calls the meaning of writing for “full chorus.” The study of 16th-century vocal style could have helped Bach in developing this innate disposition—a study that occupied him from the beginning of his musical life. In fact, we already notice its results in his first works, and Spitta is astonished that, at a time when German composers were not noted for their flowing polyphonic facility,⁵⁰ Bach was capable, in the duet from the cantata *Denn du wirst meine Seele nicht in der Hölle lassen*,⁵¹ of handling with such ease the motifs of joy and lamentation that interlaced themselves in double counterpoint. And we must not forget that, for Spitta, this cantata dates back to 1704.⁵² It is for the sake of being expressive that Bach gives the first evidence of his contrapuntal ability. Elsewhere, Wilhelm Rust, in his preface to the 28th volume of the complete edition of Bach's works, maintains that the young composer owes to his choirboy education his ability to combine the different voices in his cantatas *Aus der Tiefen*⁵³ and *Gott ist mein König*⁵⁴ (1708)—both dating from Mühlhausen—as well as in the cantata *Gottes Zeit*,⁵⁵ which was probably composed during the same period.

Finally, we see that Bach shows his admiration for the old masters by having their works sung and played. We noted above that he purchased the *Florilegium portense* in 1729 for the pupils at Saint Thomas's school, but we also know that he wrote, in the old mode, an accompaniment of cornets, trombones, and organ for a mass by Palestrina. Thus, he set his disciples on the same path that he had followed, so that, better than through his own works, they could learn how to distinguish, stitch by stitch, the weaving of this musical fabric. But they could also recognize, to the degree that they progressed, that the material upon which their teacher embroidered the greatest florid designs, and upon which he hurled the most agitated figures, had been woven on the same loom.

⁴⁹ Cited in *Historisch-Biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler* by Ernst Ludwig Gerber (Leipzig: 1790), 25.

⁵⁰ We would not know how to accept such a generalized criticism. Thus stated, it is unjust. Buxtehude—whose works Spitta nevertheless knew well—writes a counterpoint of rare elegance and of an admirably personal turn. Spitta's reprimand really only applies to composers such as Melchior Keiser or Meister.

⁵¹ BWV 15/3, mm. 9–17 et seq. See chap. 2, page 76, par. 75 and chap. 8.

⁵² [This cantata was composed by Johann Ludwig Bach according to Melvin P. Unger, *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 51.—Trans.]

⁵³ BWV 131.

⁵⁴ BWV 71.

⁵⁵ BWV 106.

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The story of Bach's life as a schoolboy sufficiently demonstrates that he had been swept along by the study of early compositions because of his apprenticeship opportunities. Note, however, that if, through a series of favorable circumstances in his young years, he was allowed to model his style upon that of the contrapuntal masters, he was perhaps encouraged in this semi-instinctive work by reading one of those theoretical works for which he had a fondness—as we learn from Charles Burney.⁵⁶ In fact, in Athanasius Kircher's *Musurgia Universalis* (1650), a book possessed by the St. John's church library in Lüneburg,⁵⁷ we find a plan of studies that Kircher outlines in a chapter in which he criticizes the breaches by modern composers. He deems it absurd that the choir masters of Rome, and other cities as well, only value and perform their own music. And he adds "Who will ever create anything honorable in poetry—even if he was born a poet—if he has not read and learned to imitate the excellent front rank of poets: Virgil, Ovid, etc.? What variety awaits our composers if, neglecting imitation, they go no further than their own discoveries?" To this very classical advice Kircher adds a list of composers who are the very same ones found in the Lüneburg and Arnstadt collections: "Who today reaches the talent and ability of Josquin Desprez, Obrecht, and Cyprien de Rore? Who, among the moderns, happens to weave harmonies with the ingeniousness of Orlando, Morales, or Palestrina?"

But Kircher not only recommends imitating the early masters, he also advises inspiring the imagination by playing the works of foreign musicians: "If we travel through Germany, France, and England, and if we carefully examine the musical works published in every style, we will find that their melodies are organized with such care, such craftsmanship, such studied elegance of ornamentation, and such a variety of charms that we will have to confess to being incapable of writing in the same way. This zeal for imitation in musical composition is the same zeal of the poets and orators for great literary works. None of the poets in Italy will ever hope to attain a distinguished competency at writing poetry in their native language if he has not secured beforehand in his spirit and memory the famous writings of Petrarch, Dante, Tasso, Ariosto, Sannazaro, and innumerable other poets. No one will be able to aspire to any perfection in painting if he is not practiced in imitating, in all his endeavors, the works left by Dürer, Raphael, Michelangelo, Reni, Rubens, and the other princes of art. And I assert that composers will benefit from similar studies, without which they will not produce anything of excellence. They will learn from the French the "hyporchematicum et exoticis triplis tumidum style" (the choreographic style expanded with triple foreign elements); from the English, the symphonic style, in which a marvelous variety of instruments flourishes; and from the Germans, the harmonious style of many voices and the ingenious

⁵⁶ See Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:736.

⁵⁷ Cf. Junghans's study cited: *J. S. Bach als Schüler*.

combining of parts. Thus, Helen's image—formed from the best-proportioned fragments based on all other images—will express a perfect harmony made up from all melodies."⁵⁸

Although that last sentence evokes the idea of a piecemeal art rather than one that is whole, we must admit, however, that on this page Kircher draws up a very sensible program of studies. The classical character of the ideas that he states must have especially enticed the young Bach if, as we might suppose, he had the chance to read Kircher's *Misurgia* when he was a "Prima" (top class) pupil at Lüneburg.⁵⁹ Moreover, he behaves as if he were following the advice of the learned Jesuit because, having familiarized himself with the language of 16th-century composers, he shows a great curiosity throughout his entire lifetime for the works of different schools. We can recognize his experience of foreign works through explicit evidence: he copies out a great number of compositions, which shows his desire to own them; he very often uses themes borrowed from foreign masters in his own compositions; and he adopts figures that belong to them.

Works of the Italian Masters

We notice the vestiges of Italian art right away in Bach's music. At the beginning of the 18th century, Italian music was admired and imitated throughout all of Europe, to which the singers and instrumentalists from "beyond the mountains" had brought and spread it. In France, where their art dominated, the Italians were deemed beautiful with a "very quaint look," called "odd comedians," and found to have the demeanor of "Siamese escaped from a painted screen."⁶⁰ And, if the Germans readily scoffed at their compatriots masquerading as Italian "virtuosi"⁶¹ as soon as they inhaled the Tuscan air smelling of "Bologna

⁵⁸ Junghans, *J. S. Bach als Schüler*, book 7, chap. 5.

⁵⁹ Bach was a very irregular pupil at the gymnasium in Eisenach (he missed 96 days in 1693, 59 in 1694, 103 in 1695, we read in the report of a history of the Eisenach gymnasium, published in the *Zeitschrift der I.M.G.*, chap. 12, 7:505). However, he was the first of the "tertianer" at the Ohrdruf Lyceum in 1697, and the second of the "secundaner" in 1699 (see the article published in 1900 by Dr. Thomas in the *Jahresbericht* of the Ohrdruf Gymnasium). In a book already cited (*Historische Bilder*), Johannes Buno, who taught at Lüneburg, applies to the study of history the famous "quis, quid, ubi," etc. (who, what, where, etc.) of the Romans. Later, Heinichen advises composers to use the "Loca topica" (Places topic), (*Neu erfundene und gründliche Anweisung zum Generalbass*, 16). And Bach, faithful to his schoolday memories—renewed, perhaps, by reading Heinichen—was accustomed to using the precepts of rhetoric in his compositions (see in Scheibe's *Critischer Musikus*, 997, Birnbaum's defense in Bach's favor).

⁶⁰ Jean François Regnard, *Le Divorce* (1688), 1:8.

⁶¹ See Johann Kuhnau's novel *Der Musicalische Quack-Salber* (1700) and Christian Weise's play *Der politische Quacksalber* (1684), sc. 2.

sausages,”⁶² at least these Germans still agreed with what Schütz’s nephew, Heinrich Albert, said when he called Italy “the mother of noble music.” From Bach’s stay at Lüneburg, he could have come to know some important works of the 17th-century Italian school, since Friedrich Emanuel Praetorius, the cantor of St. Michael’s school, had purchased Claudio Monteverdi’s *Selva morate e spirituale* (Venice 1641), and, in the collection of music manuscripts left by Praetorius, there are compositions by Albrici,⁶³ Bontempi,⁶⁴ Carissimi,⁶⁵ Perandi,⁶⁶ Pietro Torri,⁶⁷ etc. The St. John’s church library in Lüneburg contains an opera by Giovanni Andrea Bontempi, *Il Pirata* (1662),⁶⁸ and the *Prattica di Musica* by Ludovico Zacconi (1596).⁶⁹ Kircher’s *Misurgia*, which I have just quoted, is also found there, and this work, which contains some musical citations, is one of the most valuable for studying mid-17th-century Italian music.

During the last years of that century, the Italians inaugurated a new form of instrumental music: the “Concerto Grosso.” When the German, Georg Muffat, studied the Italian clavier style in Rome with Bernardo Pasquini⁷⁰ in 1682, he took great pleasure in listening to Arcangelo Corelli’s⁷¹ concertos, performed by a large number of musicians under the composer’s direction. Muffat writes in the preface to his collection of instrumental music (1701) “As I observed a large variety there, I composed some of these concertos, and they were played in Corelli’s house.” With this collection, he aspired to bring Germany the first samples of this “as yet unknown harmony.”⁷²

Around 1695 in France, composers also took the works of Italian masters as models. Sebastien de Brossard declared that “All the Parisian composers at this time—especially the organists—had the craze, so to speak, for composing sonatas in the Italian style.”⁷³

⁶² The expression comes from Friedrich Erhard Niedt in his *Musicalische Handleitung*, pt. 3, 59. The last volume was edited by Johann Mattheson after the author’s death.

⁶³ Kuhnau associated with this musician in Dresden: Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte* (Hamburg: 1740), 154.

⁶⁴ Bontempi was already Kapellmeister at the Dresden court during Schütz’s old age.

⁶⁵ On Carissimi, see the study by Quittard contained in *Concerts spirituels*, ed. by the *Schola Cantorum*.

⁶⁶ In the service of the elector of Dresden around 1652, he died Kapellmeister of the court in 1675.

⁶⁷ Torri served the elector of Bavaria and lived until 1737.

⁶⁸ Vol. 1 of *Canzoni* published by B. Grassi.

⁶⁹ See Chrysander’s study on Zacconi, “Lodovico Zacconi als Lehrer des Kunstgesanges,” in the *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft* (1891–94), vols. 7, 9, and 10.

⁷⁰ 1637–1710.

⁷¹ B. 1652, d. 1713.

⁷² *Ausserlesener mit Ernst und Lust gemengter Instrumentalmusic erste Versammlung*, Passau, 1701.

⁷³ Manuscript catalog, preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale (printed books department).

In his *Comparaison de la Musique italienne et de la Musique française* (1705), Lecerf de la Viéville cites a French clavichord master who took it upon himself to study some Italian sonatas that he “had in mind to play on his organ on Saturdays at the end of vespers.”⁷⁴ And in a book published several years later,⁷⁵ Johann Mattheson mentions a blind organist in Amsterdam who performed some Italian concertos on the organ. This artist was called Johann Jakob de Graue, born around 1670. In 1730, a friend of Johann Walther also saw de Graue, and his name appears in Walther’s *Musikalisches Lexikon* (1732). Walther himself arranged a certain number of Italian violin concertos for organ, and in the Berlin Royal Library we find a collection of thirteen concertos that he transcribed from works by Albinoni, Manzi, Gentili, Torelli, Taglietti, Gregori,⁷⁶ etc. Moreover, German composers are also represented in this group of works in the Italian style: a certain Blamr appears in it with a concerto ending in a pastorale.⁷⁷ Prince Johann Ernst of Saxe-Weimar had written *Six Concerts à un Violon concertant, deux Violons, Taille et Clavecin ou Basse de Viole*, and these concertos were published in Frankfurt in 1718, three years after Georg Philipp Telemann’s death.⁷⁸

This work interests us directly, because, among the violin concertos based on foreign works that Bach arranged for clavichord, he has left us two concertos drawn from Johann Ernst’s collection. This prince, who died in his nineteenth year, had Walther for his composition teacher, and Walther was Bach’s friend and the godfather to one of his children—Johann Gottfried, born 26 September 1712.⁷⁹ Lastly, since 1708, Bach had been court organist and chamber musician in the service of Wilhelm Ernst, duke of Weimar and uncle of the musician-prince Johann Ernst. The fact that Bach took the trouble to transcribe some works⁸⁰ by this student of Walther’s allows us to estimate, more exactly than Bach’s biographers, the importance Italian works held for him. Forkel asserts that it was in the Italian concertos by Vivaldi that Bach learned “to think musically . . . , to be aware of the linking of ideas, their relations, the variety in modulation, and many other things”⁸¹ Also, Philipp Spitta considers that Johann Sebastian reduced these Italian works to keyboard pieces in order to better observe their architecture—in other words, to analyze them thoroughly. But, in truth, this was neither a game nor an exercise, and it is evident that Bach did not look for examples in these attempts by

⁷⁴ Jean-Louis Lecerf de la Viéville, *Comparaison de la Musique italienne . . .* (Brussels: 1704), pt. 2, 98.

⁷⁵ Mattheson, *Das beschützte Orchestre* (Hamburg: 1717), 130.

⁷⁶ See the edition of Walther’s works published by M. Seiffert (*Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, series 1, vols. 26 and 27:285 and following pages).

⁷⁷ Some concertos by Meck and by Telemann are also found in this collection.

⁷⁸ Grand-ducal library of Weimar.

⁷⁹ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:386.

⁸⁰ I refer to the article by Arnold Schering, *Zur Bachforschung*, II, in *Sammelbände der I.M.G.* (Leipzig: 1903–04), 5:565.

⁸¹ Forkel, *Ueber J. S. Bachs Leben*, 24.

Walther's disciple. These orchestral pieces—arranged for a solo instrument that can only play several parts—undoubtedly seemed like “odd” adaptations to Bach, as they did to Mattheson.⁸² As Arnold Schering said very well, we can regard these arrangements by Bach very simply for what they are: “Some reductions for keyboard, written for the enjoyment of music lovers.”⁸³

On the other hand, the master took a certain delight in them. First of all, the delight of rendering more perfect the work that he transformed: in an excellent article, Schering points out all the successful recasting we owe to Bach. And this pleasure in correcting and making more supple the original composition, to better balance it out, was all the greater because he allowed the themes to spring forth with an astonishing spontaneity. It sufficed to bring a bit of craft into the arrangement of parts and an elegance and ingenuity into the accompaniment in order for the work to become extremely agreeable. Through Johann Ernst's imagination, the magnificent melodies from his Italian models came to life again in Bach's hands. Ernst sometimes seems to have inherited their verve, and Mattheson praises him in a treatise on music published in 1719,⁸⁴ pointing out his fifth concerto from the collection edited by Telemann as one of the most beautiful. But only this theme⁸⁵ that opens the composition justifies Mattheson's praise (ex. 11.1).



Ex. 11.1. Johann Ernst, *Concerto No. 5*, ed. Telemann, mm. 1–7.

There is a radiance and cordial continuity in this whole opening statement that is not unworthy of the master par excellence of Italian concertos: Antonio Vivaldi⁸⁶—the “red priest” of Venice.

It was Vivaldi's works that Bach called upon with the greatest deference. From the sixteen concertos that he arranged for clavier,⁸⁷ six came from Vivaldi.⁸⁸

⁸² Forkel, *Ueber J. S. Bachs Leben*, 130.

⁸³ Schering, *Bach's Textbehandlung*, 570.

⁸⁴ Johann Mattheson, *Exemplarische Organisten-Probe* (Hamburg: 1719), 203.

⁸⁵ I cite it according to the copy that I consulted in Weimar.

⁸⁶ This fecund composer died in 1741.

⁸⁷ BWV 972–987.

⁸⁸ See the excellent study by Arnold Schering (*Sammelbände der I.M.G.*, 4:234).

Of the concertos Bach transcribed for organ,⁸⁹ the second, in A minor, is taken from Vivaldi's *Estro armonico*,⁹⁰ and the third, in C major, from the second book of the "opera settima" (seventh work) by this "concert master of the Devout Hospital of Pity in Venice." Lastly, Bach's concerto for four claviers⁹¹ is related to Vivaldi's concerto for four violins published in *Estro armonico*.⁹²

We can certainly understand how Bach was enticed by the harmonious symmetry of these well-constructed works, but we must not overestimate their influence on his mind. He derived more delight from them than benefit. When he came to know them he already had his style, and his way of thinking and expressing was well established. Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to know when these works by Vivaldi first appeared, since they were published without an indication of their dates. However, we learn that J. J. Quantz, the famous flutist, experienced them for the first time in 1714 at Pirna. These pieces made a great impression on him, and because of the novelty of their form, he was eager to acquire quite a large number of them. "The superb ritornellos by Vivaldi," he says "served me later as an excellent model."⁹³ It is obvious that Johann Sebastian Bach liked the luminous character of Vivaldi's concertos very much and that he admired their ingenious use of two different themes. But Bach had shown proof of his architectural talent before he arranged the Italian concertos. He never expected revelations from Vivaldi's bright and well-proportioned music, since he possessed, innately, the feeling for form and the genius for its exposition. Moreover, we see that he does not slavishly reproduce Vivaldi's pieces. Even if we acknowledge that the variants Bach introduces in the motivic patterns are not merely ornamental—such as the virtuosi of that time added to the pieces they played—we still find other changes in his transcriptions that affect the work more profoundly. Thus, in the second concerto arranged for organ, Bach completes a progression that Vivaldi had left unfinished (part 1, measure 44),⁹⁴ and a little further on he leaves out a bass accompaniment that weighed down the episodic return of the principal motif (measures 52 to 54).⁹⁵ In the Largo of the second clavier concerto, he renders the melody more supple and adds an elegant and direct second part (exs. 11.2 a, b).

⁸⁹ BWV 592–597.

⁹⁰ Designated as op. 3 by the composer.

⁹¹ BWV 1065.

⁹² No. 10 (RV 580). It is included at the end of Bach's transcription (BWV 1065).

⁹³ Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Historische-kritische Beyträge* (Berlin: 1754–59), 1:205.

⁹⁴ BWV 593/1, m. 44.

⁹⁵ The first movement of Vivaldi's concerto in A minor for two violins (op. 3, no. 8, RV 522) is published in the same *Gesellschaft* volume (38:229) as Bach's organ transcription.



Ex. 11.2a. Vivaldi, *Concerto for Violin*, RV 299, mm. 1–4.



Ex. 11.2b. *Concerto for Clavier*, No. 2, BWV 973/2, mm. 1–4.

Thus, Bach reworked the Venetian's compositions with no more scruples than he brought to arranging Johann Ernst's works. Actually, these pieces that astonished the young Quantz would not even seem to Bach to have such a novel structure. He must have recognized right away in them a transference over to instrumental music from the vocal form of the aria. Arnold Schering, in a very remarkable "History of the Concerto," notes that the alternating of the soli and the tutti passages in the Italian concerto is ordered like the alternating of the melody and the ritornellos in the aria. He provides the schema of an aria taken from Cavalli's *Giasone* (Jason) (1649), and notes that Vivaldi's concertos are constructed on the same plan. So, when Johann Sebastian came to know the concertos from Italy, he had already experienced pieces arranged according to the order adopted by masters of the Italian concerto. But, in this music without words, he could admire a freer development of the purely musical idea, an abundance not limited by the text—the foe of vague lyricism. This musical discourse also had a logic, and it satisfied the intellect. The language had a kind of life of its own, though less rich in nuances than language modulated according to the motifs determined by singing. Without evoking specific images, the themes—when one considered them on their own—nevertheless aroused ideas of magnificence and indefatigable energy through their developments, their mobility, their repetitions and progressions, and, so to speak, through their fecundity. In these Latin works we find the chattering, the ability to speak of trifles, the inexhaustible flow of speech, the fullness, and the "copia" (an abundant and ready supply of language) of the early orators and rhetoricians. The smallest subject was amplified, transformed, and ennobled—all radiant and swirling, in a great splendor of sound. We just recalled how much Quantz was struck by Vivaldi's "superb ritornellos," but it is through their liveliness and glorious magniloquence that the Italians captivated

Bach. If he sometimes benefits from their methods, he is more often seized by their “ideas.” His imagination is so accustomed to form nothing but precise themes—with a well-determined expressive purpose—that he borrows instinctively from these masters of purely musical eloquence when he wants only to write music for its own sake, to express his emotions, and to live only through feelings. He also often takes on themes by Vivaldi or his pupils especially for the pieces in which he shows himself to be more of an architect than a poet. Arnold Schering points out a sonata by Vivaldi whose first measures are stated in the beginning of Bach’s concerto for two violins.⁹⁶ Here is the Italian master’s motif⁹⁷ (ex. 11.3):



Ex. 11.3. Vivaldi, *Sonata for Violin*, RV26/3, mm. 1–2.

In the “Allegro assai” from his seventh violin concerto, Bach recalls the gigue that he transcribed for clavier⁹⁸ from Vivaldi’s sixth concerto. The courante from the first of Vivaldi’s twelve “solos” for violin (op. 2), which was published in London,⁹⁹ is composed on a motif (ex. 11.4) that gives us a foretaste of Bach’s A-minor organ fugue.¹⁰⁰



Ex. 11.4. Vivaldi, *Sonata No. 1 in G minor for Violin*, RV27/4, mm. 1–5.

When Bach wants to imagine simple and easy themes, he also draws near to Vivaldi. Thus, the descending scale that begins the last movement of Bach’s first concerto for clavier has a rhythm like the scales that the priest of Venice writes at the start of a sarabande and a prelude in this same “second work” that we have been examining. But Johann Sebastian states it in the minor and with a rapid movement.¹⁰¹

Elsewhere, certain arias by the German master are rhythmed in the “Lombardy style”¹⁰²—a style Vivaldi brought into vogue.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ BWV 1043/1, mm. 1–4.

⁹⁷ Arnold Schering, *Geschichte des Instrumentalkonzerts* (Leipzig: 1905), 83.

⁹⁸ BWV 977/3, mm. 1–2 et seq.

⁹⁹ Bibliothèque Nationale, vol. 7, 6421. These “solos” are accompanied with clavier.

¹⁰⁰ BWV 543/2, mm. 1–6 et seq.

¹⁰¹ BWV 1052/3, mm. 1–13 et seq.

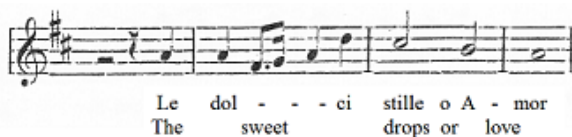
¹⁰² See the biography of Quantz in Marpurge’s *Historisch-kritische Beyträge*, 1:223.

Lastly, we can see a certain resemblance between the opening of the soprano aria from the cantata *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt* and this motif used by Vivaldi in the allegro in the fourth concerto from his seventh work¹⁰⁴ (ex. 11.5).



Ex. 11.5. Vivaldi, *Op. 7, Concerto No. 4 for Violin*, RV294a/1, mm. 1–5.

Furthermore, this phrase by Vivaldi resembles one by Antonio Lotti in an aria from *Giove in Argo* (Jupiter in Argos).¹⁰⁵ Here are its first measures (ex. 11.6):



Ex. 11.6. Antonio Lotti, *Giove in Argo*, Act I, sc. 4/2, mm. 19–21.

Perhaps Bach had heard this opera, since it was performed in Dresden under Lotti's direction during the autumn of 1717, and we know that it is around this time that the German master was summoned to Dresden by Jean-Baptiste Volumier¹⁰⁶—director of concerts at the court—who wanted to put him up against the French organist, Louis Marchand, then in favor with the king of Poland.¹⁰⁷ It is likely that Johann Sebastian benefitted from his stay in the Saxon capital by studying, in Lotti's works, what Joh. Joachim Quantz called "the pure Italian style."¹⁰⁸ We can see the interest that Bach took in these works because several of his compositions reveal it through their reminiscences. Spitta points out some of them: in the aria "Sich üben im Lieben" (To be familiar in love) from the secular cantata *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten*;¹⁰⁹ in the aria "Doch weichet ihr tollern, vergeblischen Sorgen" (Yet retreat, you frantic, futile anxieties!) from the cantata

¹⁰³ See the opening from the cantata *Freue dich, erlöste Schaar* (BWV 30/1, mm. 1–16).

¹⁰⁴ (Libro secundo) Bibliothèque Nationale, vol. 7, 1702.

¹⁰⁵ Paris Conservatory library (1368).

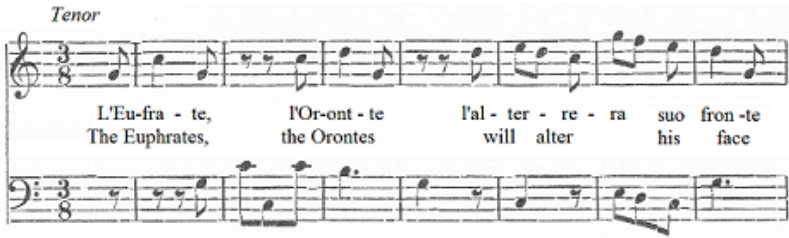
¹⁰⁶ Volumier had served at the Berlin court until 1709. He died in 1728.

¹⁰⁷ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:574.

¹⁰⁸ Marburg, *Historisch-kritische Beyträge*, collection already cited.

¹⁰⁹ BWV 202/7, mm. 22–30 et seq.

Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben,¹¹⁰ and he recognized the beginning of a tenor aria from the opera *Alessandro Severo*, performed during Venice's 1717 carnival at the St. John Chrysostomos theater.¹¹¹ Bach's remembrance of Lotti is especially evident in the aria from the cantata *Liebster Gott*. Here are the two themes (exs. 11.7a, b):



Ex. 11.7a. Antonio Lotti, *Alessandro Severo*/I, first aria, mm. 18–24.



Ex. 11.7b. *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben*, BWV 8/4, mm. 16–18.

Spitta also notes that the theme in the first aria from Lotti's *Ascanio*,¹¹² produced in Dresden in 1718, is related to the theme in the tenor aria from *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege*; however, the analogy is not as complete as in the preceding examples.¹¹³ But we can find other intriguing parallels: for instance, a soprano aria from the previously cited *Giove in Argo* (1717) (ex. 11.8a) begins somewhat like the tenor and soprano duet from the cantata *Der Herr ist mein getreuer Hirt* (ex. 11.8b).¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ BWV 8/4, mm. 16–20 et seq.

¹¹¹ Paris Conservatory library (22370).

¹¹² Paris Conservatory Library (22372).

¹¹³ BWV 213/7, mm. 1–6 et seq. (see also the *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/41, mm. 1–7 et seq.). Spitta also likens the basso continuo motif in the “Quia fecit” from Bach’s *Magnificat* to an accompanimental motif in Lotti’s *Magnificat* (*J. S. Bach*, vol. 2, p. 469).

¹¹⁴ See also the ritornello in which the motif, slightly ornamented, comes even closer to Lotti’s motif (BWV 112/4, mm. 74–80).

La tor-to-re - - la se can-gia ni - - do non ser-ba
The turtledove that flits from nest to nest is not

fi - - do gia mai l'a-mor
faithful in love

Ex. 11.8a. Antonio Lotti, *Giove in Argo*, Act I, Sc. 5/3, mm. 1–8.

Tenor

Du be-rei-test für mir ei-nen Tisch vor mein'n Feinden al-lent -
Thou preparest for me a table before my enemies every-

hal - - - - ben
where

Ex. 11.8b. *Der Herr is mein getreuer Hirt*, BWV 112/4, mm. 18–23.

In a collection of Lotti's arias,¹¹⁵ we find a motif at the beginning of the soprano aria "Misera navicella" (Miserable ship) (ex. 11.9a) that reappears at the beginning of an aria in the *Coffee Cantata* (ex. 11.9b).

Ex. 11.9a. Antonio Lotti, *Misera navicella*, soprano aria, mm. 1–6.

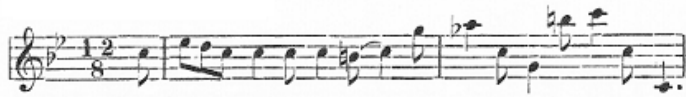
Hat man nicht mit sei-nen Kin-dern hun-dert-tau-send Hu-de - - lei!
Have we not with our children one hundred thousand aggravations!

Ex. 11.9b. *Coffee cantata*, BWV 211/2, mm. 7–9.

¹¹⁵ Paris Conservatory library, 32 *Arias by Sigr. Anto. Lotti* (24318).

Bach's interest in Lotti's compositions is shown again through other evidence: the Berlin library contains a copy of a mass in G major by the Italian master, undoubtedly transcribed by Johann Sebastian near the middle of the time that he lived in Leipzig.¹¹⁶

From the Italians, Bach also borrowed large phrases from pieces in the rhythmic "siciliano" style, some models of which Alessandro Scarlatti could offer him. This motif from the opera *Laodicea e Berenice* (1701) (ex. 11.10)¹¹⁷ appears to foreshadow the motif in the last chorus from Bach's *Trauer-Ode* (1727).¹¹⁸



Ex. 11.10. Alessandro Scarlatti, *Laodicea e Bernice*, Act III, sc. 10/6, mm. 1–2.

The ritornello from an aria in Scarlatti's opera *Il Telemacco* (Telemachus) (1718)¹¹⁹ offers us another type of siciliano (ex. 11.11), whose broad period is adorned with this modulation (m. 4) characteristic of Bach:



Ex. 11.11. Alessandro Scarlatti, *Il Telemacco*, Act I, sc. 1/7, mm. 1–5, 23–27.

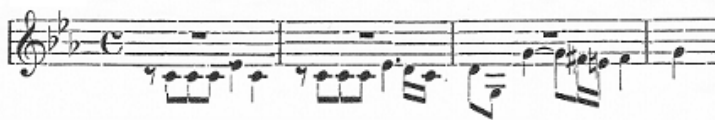
We also find Giovanni Legrenzi (1625?–90) among the Italian masters whose compositions had captivated Bach. A fugue for organ, preserved in the manuscript said to be by Andreas Bach, carries the indication "Thema Legrenzianum elaboratum cum subjecto pedaliter." I have searched in vain for this motif in Legrenzi's works that I have been able to look through, but he readily forms other themes (ex. 11.12b) analogous to this one fashioned by Bach (ex. 11.12a).

¹¹⁶ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:469.

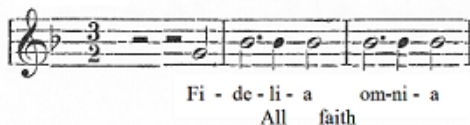
¹¹⁷ Bibliothèque Nationale, vol. 4, 16.

¹¹⁸ BWV 198/10, mm. 1–4 et seq.

¹¹⁹ Paris Conservatory library, 22411.



Ex. 11.12a. *Fugue in C minor on a Theme by Legrenzi*, BWV 574, mm. 1–4.



Ex. 11.12b. Giovanni Legrenzi, *Confitebor tibi Domine*, mm. 250–52.

Bach's organ fugue in B minor¹²⁰ is an admirable development of one by Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) inserted into his fourth of twelve sonatas for three instruments ("opera terza"; the third work).¹²¹

In the subject of a fugue by Chiava di Lucca,¹²² we can make out some of the theme in the E-flat fugue from the third part of the *Clavier-Übung*.¹²³ The collection in which di Lucca's piece is found also contains a sonata by Pollaroli and several compositions by Aresti di Bologna—composers whose works Bach's pupils studied.¹²⁴ Two of Bach's clavier fugues¹²⁵ are written on themes by Tommaso Albinoni.

In short, Bach reaches back to the roots of Italian instrumental art. In 1714, he acquired a copy of *Fiori musicali* (1635) by Frescobaldi,¹²⁶ one of the first masters of fugal style. Some recollections of this work appear in one of Bach's organ pieces, whose title is even Italian (*Canzona*; Song). Here are the first measures of Bach's composition (ex. 11.13).

¹²⁰ BWV 579, mm. 1–11 et seq.

¹²¹ See the edition of Corelli's works by J. Joachim in *Denkmäler der Tonkunst III* (Hamburg: Bergedorf, 1871), 142.

¹²² *Sonata da Organo o Cembalo del Sig. Ziani*, etc. (1879), Bibliothèque Nationale, vol. 7.

¹²³ BWV 805/2, mm. 1–21 et seq.

¹²⁴ See Seiffert's work: *Geschichte der Klaviermusik* (Leipzig: 1899), 268, 379.

¹²⁵ BWV 950, mm. 1–10 et seq.; BWV 951, mm. 1–10 et seq. See Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:424, 425.

¹²⁶ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:418.



Ex. 11.13. *Canzona in D minor*, BWV 588, mm. 1–14.

The second “Christe” from the *Kyrie delli Apostoli* (Kyrie of the Apostles) in the *Fiori Musicali* (p. 38) (ex. 11.14) contains a fragment of the theme and the countersubject found in Bach’s *Canzona*.



Ex. 11.14. G. Frescobaldi, *Fiori musicali*: *Kyrie delli Apostoli*, “Christe,” mm. 1–7.

Bach’s principal motif appears to come from Frescobaldi’s *Messa della Madonna* in the form of a countersubject to the theme of a piece entitled *Canzon dopo l’epistola* (p. 77 in *Fiori musicali*) (ex. 11.15).



Ex. 11.15. G. Frescobaldi, *Fiori musicali*: *Messa della Madonna*, “Canzon dopo la Pistola,” mm. 2–4.

Note also that, in this same work by Frescobaldi, the rhythm becomes ternary toward the middle. This was a familiar procedure for the Italian master, and we find a similar change of motion in Bach’s piece.¹²⁷

Perhaps there is still a vague reminiscence of Frescobaldi’s *Capriccio sopra ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la* in Bach’s C-major fugue,¹²⁸ in which he seems to treat,

¹²⁷ BWV 588, m. 71 et seq.

¹²⁸ BWV 946, mm. 1–11 et seq.

in his own way, a subject often employed by the early masters—the subject formed from the notes of the hexachord.¹²⁹

Lastly, we should note that Johann Sebastian also adopts the practices of Italian clavierists: octaves in the bass¹³⁰ and hand crossing.¹³¹ In two preludes,¹³² Max Seiffert recognizes something in Bach's writing from Poglietti's style;¹³³ four fugues¹³⁴ remind him of Albinoni; and a G-major toccata¹³⁵ and an A-minor prelude¹³⁶ recall Vivaldi. The title alone—*Aria alla maniera italiana*¹³⁷—shows the influence Bach was writing under, and, in the second part of the *Clavier-Übung* (1735), he offers a *Concerto nach italienischen Gusto*.¹³⁸ Arnold Schering¹³⁹ has pointed out that the theme from the first part of this work already appeared in Muffat's *Florilegium primum*.¹⁴⁰

* * *

French Music

Bach was still a pupil at St. Michael's school in Lüneburg when he became acquainted with French music. The authors of his obituary, published in Mizler's *Musikalische Bibliothek*,¹⁴¹ write that, during his stay in Lüneburg, Bach "had the opportunity to strengthen himself in the French style—new then in this region—by listening frequently to a famous musical company maintained by the duke of Celle and consisting mostly of Frenchmen." Johann Sebastian joined the choristers at St. Michael's school in April of 1700¹⁴² and left Lüneburg three years later. And Bach must have had a great desire to study the French style in order for him to be prompted to undertake several times a crossing of the heaths bordering Lüneburg, since the distance between this town and Celle is considerable (around

¹²⁹ Froberger has written on this theme (*Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich*, vol. 4).

¹³⁰ *Clavier-Übung*, part one, prelude from the first partita (BWV 825/1, mm. 20–21).

¹³¹ Goldberg variations (*Clavier-Übung*, part four, BWV 988) – Gigue from the first partita (BWV 825/7, mm. 1–16 et seq.).

¹³² BWV 921 and 922. The C-minor prelude was written before 1713 (Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, vol. 1, p. 429).

¹³³ Poglietti's clavier works have been published by H. Botstiber in the 13th year of the *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich* (part 2, p. 1).

¹³⁴ Seiffert, *Geschichte der Klavermusik*, 380 (BWV 896, BWV 947, BWV 949, BWV 958).

¹³⁵ BWV 916.

¹³⁶ BWV 894.

¹³⁷ BWV 989.

¹³⁸ BWV 971.

¹³⁹ Schering, *Sammelbände der I. M. G.*, 243.

¹⁴⁰ Schering, *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich* (Vienna: 1895), vol. 1², p. 76.

¹⁴¹ Lorenz Mizler, *Dissertatio quod Musica ars sit* (Leipzig: 1734), pt. 1, 4:162.

¹⁴² See the work already cited by Junghans, *J. S. Bach als Schüler*.

80 kilometers; 49.7 miles). Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach traveled this countryside during the winter of 1710, and he speaks with horror of the detestable roads and quagmires he encountered when drawn over this desert of uneven earth, covered with “wild” vegetation. As a poor student, Bach would have gone on foot; but he at least escaped those rough jolts those traveling by coach could not forget.¹⁴³ We can imagine that he only ventured on the run-down routes at the nice time of the year during summer holidays and that there was some allure in his stopping places: a completely unfettered solitude would reveal itself to him, and with every hill that he climbed he would see the ever-expanding, wavy layer of fragrant heather.

Actually, the concerts that Bach wanted to hear at Celle—at the cost of this long pilgrimage—were not something as new as we would be tempted to believe from reading the few lines from his obituary that I cited. Philipp Spitta points out a document from 1663, in which “French music” is already mentioned.¹⁴⁴ In 1612, Michael Praetorius dedicated to Prince Ulrich, duke of Brandenburg, Lüneburg, etc., a collection of music for several instruments that combines “all types of French dances and songs . . . such as dancing masters play in France,”¹⁴⁵ and which, the editor adds, can be used very well as “banquet music.” For the most part, these pieces had been imparted to Praetorius by Antoine Emeraud, Friedrich Ulrich’s dancing master, and some of them had already been performed by Francisque Caroubel.¹⁴⁶

Thus, the very rhythmic French music was spread in Germany by the dancing masters. In Samuel Chappuzeau’s account of a trip made in 1669 to the courts of the electors, he names “Tiolet, François, famous dancing master, who has served for ten years in the Cassel court, where he is loved.”¹⁴⁷ We should note that in precisely the same period, probably even at Cassel, a collection of French music was put together that Écorcheville began publishing and in which we encounter works of some of the most famous composers of French dances: Belleville, Bruslard, Constantin, Dumanoir, Mazuel, Pinel.¹⁴⁸ The glory of another of these

¹⁴³ Uffenbach, *Merkwürdige Reisen durch Niedersachsen, Holland und Engelland* (Ulm: 1753), 1:460.

¹⁴⁴ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:197.

¹⁴⁵ M. Praetorius, *Terpsichore, Musarum Aoniarum quinta* (Wolfenbüttel: 1612).

¹⁴⁶ Thus, the gavotte appearing in fol. 21a of Antoine Francisque’s *Trésor d’Orphée* (1600) is found in Praetorius’s collection.

¹⁴⁷ Chappuzeau, *L’Allemagne protestante* (Geneva: 1771), 213. Chappuzeau also cites “de Zonsy, dancing master of S. A. E. from Palatinate, the most renown of our time, and who is admired for the choreography and performance of ballets in France, Sweden, and in several other European provinces” (p. 518).

¹⁴⁸ For all these musicians I refer to Jules Ecorcheville’s excellent study *Vingt suites d’orchestre du XVIIe siècle français* (Paris: 1906).

“illustrious ones” was also propagated in Germany, and we find a piece called *La Bocane*—based on the composer’s name—preserved in the Wolfenbüttel library.¹⁴⁹

At the court in Celle, this fiddlers’ music was probably in favor. Since 1665, Éléonore Desmier d’Olbreuze had reigned there before having the title of duchess, which she did not receive until 1675, the year that her union with Duke Georg Wilhelm of Braunschweig-Lüneburg was solemnly declared. She was born to a Huguenot family from Poitou and had taken leave from the house of the princess of Tarente, who belonged to the Hesse family. Madame d’Olbreuze was known for her “great passion for dancing,” and “she often entertained the princess and her guests with the regional and country dances that she had learned in her early youth.”¹⁵⁰ Even though her fortune grew, she kept the same taste for the popular music of her homeland, and in the “Suites” written then by French composers, she was able to find all these rhythms that pleased her, right down to those she remembered from her native province; for “swingings (‘branles’) from Pitou”—although a little out of fashion—were still played.¹⁵¹

We can therefore grant that music for the dance was always at the heart of the French concerts at Celle during the period that Johann Sebastian heard them. It is also likely that Georg Wilhelm’s musicians played overtures from Lully’s operas, but this part of their program would not have held anything very new for Bach, if it is true that Pachelbel—teacher of his brother, Johann Christoph—had been, as Mattheson writes, “the first to introduce the overture form into clavier music.”¹⁵² However, we notice that in 1704 Telemann went into raptures over the French overtures by Lully and Campra—as if this type of composition had just been revealed to him.¹⁵³

Whatever the repertoire of the French musicians at Celle may have been, I can readily believe that Bach was less interested in the pieces they performed than in their performance principles. Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg tells us that many of the famous German virtuosi acknowledged “that they had borrowed from the French the elegance of their style. In comparison to other countries, French composers have shown themselves to be painstaking in their indication of ‘manières’ (styles). Along with the famous Georg Muffat, the skilled clavierist Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer seems to have been the first among the Germans to acquaint us with this facet of French music. In all Fischer’s clavier works—for example in the collection entitled *Musicalisches Blumen-Büschlein* that appeared right at the turn of the century (1699)—the ornaments are indicated in the French manner. And from the explanation of these markings that he gives before the

¹⁴⁹ Collection 296. The real name of the composer must be Jacques Cordier. See Ecorcheville’s book *Vingt suites d’orchestre*, 12.

¹⁵⁰ See Horric de Beaucaire’s study *Une Mésalliance dans la Maison de Brunswick* (1884).

¹⁵¹ We find them again in Campra’s *Ballet des Ages*.

¹⁵² Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*. This affirmation by Mattheson is not substantiated by any evidence.

¹⁵³ Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, 360.

pieces, we realize that they were still very little known.”¹⁵⁴ It is also fitting to note that, at the beginning of the century, “the smoothness of the French instrumentalists’ playing” was greatly admired.¹⁵⁵ When the authors of Bach’s obituary tell us that “the French style” was new in Celle around 1700, we must understand not that French music was unknown in Germany, but rather that its methods had only been applied there for a short time.

We do not know how Bach gained admittance to hear this princely “band”; however, if we believe Gregorio Leti, one could easily penetrate the court of Georg Wilhelm if one wore “the clothes of a soldier, hunter, or musician.”¹⁵⁶ But Bach was awfully young to dare to put himself forth on the merit of his talent. Furthermore, he must have been more interested in the rehearsals and the school for conductors than the stately concerts. Perhaps he found someone from Lüneburg itself to introduce him, since, as in Celle, there were some protestant refugees in Lüneburg, and one of the “elders” of Celle’s reformed community was the son-in-law of the Lüneburg burgermeister.¹⁵⁷

Only a few names of the prince’s French musicians have come down to us. The records from the reformed community of Celle mention a certain La Selle in 1689, and in 1704 they mention the death of Philippe Curbasatur. The same year, Henry de Hays was recorded as being baptized there.¹⁵⁸ Georg Wilhelm’s organist was called Charles Gaudon, and he became an elder of the reformed community in 1707.¹⁵⁹ We might even let ourselves suppose that this French musician—who also belonged to the court orchestra, probably in the capacity of clavierist—introduced Bach to his compatriots’ clavier pieces and to the works of these “several good French organists that he holds as models,” along with the works of Bruhns, Reinken, and Buxtehude, even though a few months after his

¹⁵⁴ Marpur, *Historisch-kritische Beyträge*, 1:27.

¹⁵⁵ Marpur, *Historisch-kritische Beyträge*, 206. Mattheson also praises the unified and firm playing of the French in *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg: 1713), 226. See the remarks by Georg Muffat, who informs us on the French performance traditions by Lully (*Florilegium primum*, 1695, and *Florilegium secundum*, 1698, published in the *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich*, vols. 1² and 2²).

¹⁵⁶ Leti, *Abrégé de l’Histoire de la Maison sérénissime de Brunswick* (1687), 327.

¹⁵⁷ This was the physician, Scott. It is also probable that some sons of the refugees were among Bach’s fellow classmates. I note in passing that Armand Lestocq, who played a rather important role in the Russian court, was the son of a French Calvinist, emigrated from Hanover (Manstein, *Mémoires historiques sur la Russie* [1772], 2:210). Then, an “elder” of the community at Celle was called Lestocq. He had married Judith Colin, from Vitry-le-François, and in 1686, he had a son, Jean-Paul. Would he be the older brother of Armand Lestocq? Perhaps it is also useful to add that an A. Lestocq came from Russia in 1613, the same year as Georg Erdman, Bach’s classmate at Lüneburg.

¹⁵⁸ Such is the information obtained from the searches made at my request.

¹⁵⁹ I owe this reference to Pastor W. Deiss, to whom I hereby express all my gratitude. Gaudon is cited in *Geschichtsblätter des deutschen Hugenotten-Verein* (1893), p. 46, and he died in 1736.

departure from Lüneburg, Bach was appointed as organist at the “New Church” in Arnstadt.¹⁶⁰

We have sound evidence of the zeal with which Bach studied these foreign works, since a copy in his own hand has been preserved of *Livre d’Orgue* by Nicolas de Grigny, organist at Rheims (1671?–1709). According to the handwriting, Dr. Erich Prieger, owner of this manuscript, thinks that it dates back to around 1703. Moreover, this copy seems to coincide with an edition produced in 1700, whereas only the 1711 edition still exists that was published after de Grigny’s death.¹⁶¹ Bach appears to have harbored, for a long time, a certain interest for this work that he had acquired in his youth, and the example of de Grigny is invoked again in a document published in 1738 by Abraham Birnbaum but inspired by Bach himself. The master of Leipzig had been reproached “for squeezing the slightest ornaments out of every note and for depriving them of all that we understand to be the art of good performance,” and Birnbaum, Bach’s defender, points out de Grigny, who follows the same approach in his *Livre d’Orgue*. Elsewhere, Adlung mentions de Grigny several times.¹⁶²

It was only a little while before his death that Bach turned over this collection to his pupil, Christian Friedrich Penzel.¹⁶³ And, by 1788, another copy of de Grigny’s pieces was also in the hands of J. P. Theodor Nehrlich, who had studied with Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach.¹⁶⁴

Johann Sebastian’s persistent remembering of the Rheims organist and his disciples allows us to believe that the master of Leipzig had a preference for de Grigny and that he appreciated something about de Grigny’s music other than the ingeniousness of his ornamental figures or the skillful mixtures of his organ registrations. De Grigny actually distinguished himself among French organists by some rather rare qualities. Coming from a family of country fiddlers with an undisciplined way of life,¹⁶⁵ this composer nevertheless achieved a very high standing through his strong-willed and reflective art. His pieces never have the character of written improvisations—like so many pieces by his French contemporaries who owe their inspiration only to the agile caprice of their fingers. His style astonishes us because so much of it is serious and direct and contains a veiled elegance that belongs to him alone. From the most insignificant and least flexible plainchant motif, he creates a pliant subject that spreads out in florid and

¹⁶⁰ At Lüneburg and Celle, Bach could have become acquainted with the 16th-century French works imported by the refugees. We may note here the ministerial library in Celle still possesses two parts from a quatrain by Pibrac set to music by P. de L’Estocart (1582).

¹⁶¹ This edition is reproduced by A. Guilmant in his *Archives des Maîtres de l’Orgue* (1715), vol. 5.

¹⁶² Jakob Adlung, *Anleitung zu der musikalischen Gelahrtheit* (Erfurt: 1758), 419, 431.

¹⁶³ 1737–1805.

¹⁶⁴ Eitner, de Grigny article, *Quellen-Lexikon*, 4:376.

¹⁶⁵ See the studies that I have published in Guilmant’s *Archives* (vol. 5) and in the *Tribune de Saint-Gervais* (1905), 14.

expressive lines. Without being enslaved to copying the same contours, his arabesques enliven a theme by prolonging it. They are, at once, both diverse in structure and similar in style. With what fantasy, discretion, and grace has this composer laid out these blended motifs. Moreover, his imagination is not hampered by liturgical requirements. He develops his thoughts to his liking, without fear of being interrupted by the hand bell that governs Parisian organists from the choir.¹⁶⁶ Whereas Nicolas Gigault, for example, attempts to write pieces “that can be ended in several places” without playing them in their entirety,¹⁶⁷ de Grigny never divides his broad discourse into short, windy clauses, with the sole concern of being silent at the right moment rather than speaking well. Instead of a poor and irregular prose that constantly returns to its point of departure, he speaks to us in an abundant and lively language. After each clause, its verve never seems spent. It does not fall asleep in a monotony of cadences that are too close together. And, when he dares touch upon liturgical themes¹⁶⁸—restoring them to a rhythm that cantors no longer know—he protects his hymn or mass verses from the dryness that makes so many verses from that same period as disagreeable as the counterpoint exercises of clumsy schoolboys. This freedom in variation and deployment could entice Bach just exactly at this period of his life when—to the great confusion of the faithful in Arnstadt—he enjoyed mixing “strange variations”¹⁶⁹ into the chorales that he accompanied and allowed himself to play “for too long.”¹⁷⁰ In short, the generally devotional turn of the Rheims organist’s compositions rendered them even more acceptable to the German organist than certain works in which the French put a theatrical pomp—or else sacrificed to the popular taste. In fact, we never find among de Grigny’s works a piece like *Vive le Roy des Parisiens* by André Raison, organist at the abbey of Sainte Geneviève, and we would search de Grigny in vain for such tritely paced Christmas verses with the base reminiscences that understandably scandalized the German traveler Nemeitz.¹⁷¹ I add that, through his choice of themes, de Grigny proves that he has not remained ignorant of foreign music. While the French go about repeating, along with Lecerf de la Viéville, that “the Germans’ music is hard and heavy like their spirit,”¹⁷² de Grigny shows that he has looked over the works of Johann Jakob Froberger, whom Loret so

¹⁶⁶ Nicolas de Grigny, *Caeremoniale parisienne* (1662), 534.

¹⁶⁷ Nicolas Gigault, *Livre de Musique pour l’Orgue*, 1685. (Guilmant, *Archives des Maîtres de l’Orgue*, vol. 4.)

¹⁶⁸ The Parisian ceremony forbade changing anything whatsoever of the diocesan singing in the organ verses (Grigny, *Caeremoniale parisienne*, 538, § 21).

¹⁶⁹ See Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:313.

¹⁷⁰ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1: 314.

¹⁷¹ Nemeitz, *Séjour de Paris*, 232: “The music played in churches is not too devout (at the midnight mass), since the organs play minuets and all kinds of mundane airs. That is when much lewdness, foolishness, and impieties occur.” In S. de Valhebert’s *Agenda du voyageur* (1727), 16, we find a rather injudicious defense of the practice attacked by Nemeitz.

¹⁷² Lecerf de la Viéville, *Comparaison de la Musique italienne*, pt. 2, 178.

disdainfully called “a certain fat, German blowhard” (1652),¹⁷³ but from whom François Roberday—chamber valet to the queen, and Louis Couperin’s friend—borrowed some motifs and an entire piece for his *Fugues et Caprices*.¹⁷⁴ In fact, it is easy to recognize recollections of the theme from a *Capriccio* by Froberger¹⁷⁵ in Roberday’s “dialog . . . for communion.”¹⁷⁶ Moreover, in the “pedal point on full stops”—the last piece in his book—he uses the descending chromatic series familiar to German and Italian masters,¹⁷⁷ and he treats it in a form whose origin is not French. Roberday’s intellectual curiosity is thus revived in de Grigny. But, in the case of the Rheims organist, this quality affirms a less abstract composer, with a more diverse gift, and one in whose work we divine the inspiration of a tender and contemplative soul.

On the subject of explicitly formulated ornaments, Birnbaum also relies on the example given by Du Mage. This organist from Saint-Quentin, who was Louis Marchand’s pupil, has left a *Livre d’orgue* dated from 1708.¹⁷⁸ Others appearing in the same period are Guilain, who had also studied with Marchand;¹⁷⁹ Clérambault, whom André Raison had shaped; Corrette;¹⁸⁰ Dandrieu;¹⁸¹ and Nicholas de Grigny. They were the heirs of Nicholas Le Bègue,¹⁸² Guillaume Gabriel Nivers,¹⁸³ and d’Anglebert.¹⁸⁴ Works by nearly all these composers are found in the manuscript collections of Bach’s disciples.¹⁸⁵ The foremost of these organists had acquired a certain fame, and Forkel considers them to be skillful masters of fugue and harmony.¹⁸⁶ Indeed, we sometimes find among them surprising chord progressions that, as was said in the 17th century, “please the senses.” But it is impossible to consider their works as models of polyphonic style or to admire in their fugal writing anything other than a certain unsophisticated freedom, in which more awkwardness than boldness appears. In their compositions, Bach only looked for the melodic quality that is unique to them; consequently, he hardly concerned himself with their themes and ornaments. He

¹⁷³ Jean Loret, *La Muze historique* (1650–65), ed. Ravenel & de la Pelouse (1857), 1:291.

¹⁷⁴ *Archives des Maîtres de l’Orgue* (1901), vol. 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Archives des Maîtres de l’Orgue*, 5:49.

¹⁷⁶ *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich*.

¹⁷⁷ *Archives de Maîtres de l’Orgue*, 5:95. Some French composers also employ this series; such as Clérambault, in his organ pieces (*Arch. des Maîtres de l’Orgue*, 3:107) in 1710, and Elizabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, in her *Pièces de Clavecin* (1707), and F. Couperin, in his *Muse plantine*.

¹⁷⁸ *Archives des Maîtres de l’Orgue*, vol. 3.

¹⁷⁹ *Archives des Maîtres de l’Orgue*, vol. 3.

¹⁸⁰ G. Corrette composed *Pièces d’orgue* in 1703.

¹⁸¹ *Archives des Maîtres de l’Orgue*, vol. 7.

¹⁸² Alexandre Guilman is preparing a new edition of this organist to Louis XIV.

¹⁸³ First *Livre d’orgue* in 1665.

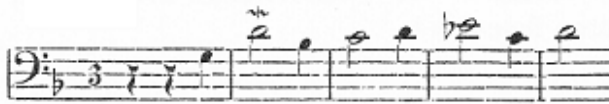
¹⁸⁴ The fugues by this organist (1689) are in Guilman’s *École classique de l’Orgue* (no. 25).

¹⁸⁵ See Seiffert’s *Geschichte der Klaviermusik*.

¹⁸⁶ Forkel, *Ueber J. S. Bachs Leben*, 24.

had singled out, right away, that in which the French excelled. The “uniformity” of their music and their “warmed up and overworked ideas” must have appeared worthless to him, as they did to J. J. Quantz.¹⁸⁷ Like Forkel, Bach undoubtedly deemed Couperin’s thoughts very often “poor and without power,”¹⁸⁸ but he could not miss perceiving what redeemed this monotony and childishness: the elegance and voluptuous melancholy of certain motifs, the precision and nobility of rhythm, and, lastly, a restraint¹⁸⁹ that is not always forced, but sometimes shows a praiseworthy discretion.

We also see Bach employing motifs borrowed from French composers, and this verifies that, having read through their works, he had liked something from that reading. It is at least a point of interest and nearly a tribute to adopt the theme created by another composer, even when correcting it. Moreover, Bach naturally transforms the subjects that he undertakes, and he especially enlarges them. The slender branches that he has gathered, perhaps from an absent-minded hand, become—transplanted in his soil—marvelous trees. A modest refrain by André Raison blossoms in the wonderful phrase on which he based his passacaglia for two keyboards and pedals (ex. 11.16).



Ex. 11.16. André Raison, *Archives des Maîtres de l'Orgue*, II/2/3, mm. 3–7.

A fugal motif by Louis Marchand (1700?) does not reveal all its langorous charm until it is transformed in one of the Brandenburg concertos (exs. 11.17a, b).



Ex. 11.17a. Louis Marchand, *Archives des Maîtres de l'Orgue*, III/5/5, mm. 1–5.



Ex. 11.17b. *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D major*, BWV 1050/2, mm. 1–2.

¹⁸⁷ Marpurg, *Historische-kritische Beyträge*, 1:237.

¹⁸⁸ Marpurg, *Historische-kritische Beyträge*, 1:7.

¹⁸⁹ Nemeitz thinks that, inferior to the Germans as organists, the French at least accompanied “in a charming way. They have a quick hand and play nothing superfluous” (*Séjour de Paris*, p. 71).

The theme from the *Allemande* in the first of Couperin's *Concerts Royaux* (1722)¹⁹⁰ seems to be a sketch that has collided with the luminous and endearing theme of the A-flat fugue from part two of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (exs. 11.18a, b).



Ex. 11.18a. François Couperin, *Concerts Royaux*, No. 1/1, mm. 1–3.



Ex. 11.18b. *The Well-Tempered Clavier II*, "Fugue XVII in Ab major," BWV 886/2, mm. 1–3.

In the prelude from the first *English Suite*, we recognize a variation of the descending hexachord dear to French clavierists¹⁹¹ (exs. 11.19a–d).



Ex. 11.19a. Louis Marchand, *La Vénitienne*, mm. 1–7.



Ex. 11.19b. Charles Dieupart, *Gigue*, mm. 1–5.

¹⁹⁰ These concertos had been played for Louis XIV.

¹⁹¹ De Chambonnières already uses it in *La Madelonnette* (1670).

Ex. 11.19c, Gaspard Le Roux, *Gigue*, mm. 1–7.Ex. 11.19d. *English Suite No. 1 in A major*, BWV 806/1, mm. 3–5.

Thus Bach produces a definitive version of this flowing and easy motif, in which the dominant characteristics of French music appear clear, fluid, and completely unified. Moreover, he presents it with the breadth that suits it, reckoning that the gigue rhythm expresses it with too much agitation. From this common ground of the music, he creates a work that summarizes, corrects, and perfects all the works already composed on the same subject, and he renders futile all future attempts.¹⁹² Note, as well, that Bach did not ignore the pieces whose first measures I have cited. In the manuscript collection of Bach's pupil, Krebs, we find a suite in D minor by Gaspard le Roux,¹⁹³ and a suite in A major by Charles Dieupart appears in the same book. Johann Sebastian had also copied it¹⁹⁴ a reproduction of this copy can be found in a manuscript at the Berlin royal library under the name of Nicholas de Grigny, an incorrect attribution accepted by Philipp Spitta.¹⁹⁵ Lastly, Bach knew Louis Marchand's works. When he came to Dresden in 1717 to be measured up against the French organist and clavierist, he was

¹⁹² He does the same thing each time he deals with a borrowed theme.

¹⁹³ Le Roux, *Pièces de clavecin, composées par Gaspard Le Roux* (Paris: Foucaut, 1705).

¹⁹⁴ Likewise with an F-minor suite. I know the pieces by Dieupart according to the copy in the library of Wolfenbüttel (s. d.).

¹⁹⁵ I possess a transcription of it.

endowed with the very best of his rival's works. In 1714, his pupil, Ludwig Krebs, possessed a suite by Marchand that he had transcribed in his notebook;¹⁹⁶ and Andreas Bach's notebook, undoubtedly drawn up by J. Bernhard Bach between 1715 and 1717,¹⁹⁷ also contains a borrowing from the celebrated clavierist. Not only Marchand's works, but his style itself, must have been familiar to Bach, since numerous German virtuosos were shaped in Paris and had spread the French method in their homeland. From the time when Johann Jakob Froberger adopted, for the clavier, the "style" of lutenists Gallot and Gautier,¹⁹⁸ the Germans had not ceased studying the works of Louis XIV's composers. Johann Fischer had been music copyist in Paris under Lully's direction,¹⁹⁹ and Georg Muffat, born in Alsace, worked for six years with the same master.²⁰⁰ Jean Sigismond Cousser had benefitted, during an equal amount of time, from Lully's famous teaching: in 1682, he wrote, in the dedication of his first work, intended for the duke of Wurttemberg: "I set myself to follow his approach and to enter into his refined ways as much as I possibly could."²⁰¹ Philipp Heinrich Erlebach (1657–1714) subjected himself to the same discipline. In 1693, he published six overtures "in the French style," and in 1705, he ended the music for his *Actus homagialis* (Homagial act) with a march akin to those from French operas, which was sent by the Thuringian city of Mühlhausen to Emperor Joseph.²⁰² The memory of this splendid composition had not yet faded when Bach left his post as organist at St. Blasius Church in the summer of 1707 to live in the old imperial city of Weimar. He had undoubtedly heard even earlier some work in which Erlebach, Kapellmeister in Rudolstadt, showed his French apprenticeship.

As to the German instrumentalists who had associated with the "skillful" of Paris, we find several of them in Bach's vicinity. Ernst Christian Hesse, born in Grossen-Gottern, not far from Mühlhausen, had undertaken his musical studies in 1676 at Langensalza, pursued them at Eisenach when Johann Sebastian probably still lived there, and went to Paris in 1698 where he became the pupil of two rival musicians at the same time: Antoine Forqueray and Marin Marais, of whom, it is said, "one played like a devil, and the other like an angel."²⁰³ Hesse studied the viola da gamba for three years under their guidance.²⁰⁴ During Bach's first stay in Weimar (1703), where he served as violinist in the orchestra of Johann Ernst,

¹⁹⁶ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:576.

¹⁹⁷ Buchmayer, *Kommentar* on pieces he performed in Leipzig, 27 February 1904.

¹⁹⁸ Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*.

¹⁹⁹ Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, 61.

²⁰⁰ See Muffat's work cited above: *Ausserlesener mit Ernst und Lust gemengter Instrumentalmusic erste Versammlung* (Passau: 1701).

²⁰¹ Cousser, *Composition de musique suivant la méthode française*.

²⁰² I possess a copy of this work transcribed from a manuscript preserved in the *Hochschule für Musik* in Berlin.

²⁰³ Hubert le Blanc, *Défense de la Basse Viole* (Amsterdam: Pièree Mortier, 1740), 59.

²⁰⁴ Ernst Ludwig Gerber, *Historisch-biographischer Lexikon*.

brother of the reigning prince, he had Johann Paul von Westhoff (1656–1705) as a colleague in the sovereign's chapel. The son of an officer under Gustave-Adolphe, von Westhoff had been a tutor "in linguis exoticis" (in foreign languages) to the sons of Johann Georg III of Saxony, as well as a chamber musician in Dresden, and then had fought in Hungary against the Turks. In 1682, in the course of a trip to Italy, England, France, and Holland, he stopped at Versailles on his way from London, and he had "the honor of playing before the king and his court."²⁰⁵

In the following years, Bach undoubtedly found the opportunity to know Pantaleon Hebenstreit, who performed for Louis XIV, and who was ballet master and chapel director at the court of Eisenach upon returning from France (1706). "An extremely beautiful music was rapidly established, in which Hebenstreit had introduced the careful and even performance that is especially characteristic of French music, and which he still had fresh in his memory, since he so recently came from France."²⁰⁶ In 1708, Hebenstreit left for Dresden, where the Elector took him into service. And on 26 November 1715, a flutist from Marseille called Pierre-Gabriel Buffardin also joined this excellent orchestra of the Saxon court.²⁰⁷ Johann Sebastian must have come to know Buffardin quite readily, since this instrumentalist had given lessons to Johann Jakob Bach, his "fratello diletissimo" (beloved brother) whose departure was mourned in the moving caprice that I cited earlier. Johann Jakob had suffered the fate of Charles XII—taking refuge with the king in Bender [Tighina] after the battle of Poltava. In 1713, Jakob was allowed to move to Stockholm as court musician, and he stopped first at Constantinople, where the French ambassador had Buffardin in his service. Moreover, Johann Sebastian certainly must have become acquainted with Buffardin through speaking to him of Johann Jakob's stay in Constantinople.²⁰⁸

Thus informed by the example and talk of so many artists, Bach had acquired the finest of French technique. Couperin's works that he valued and recommended to his pupils had served him equally well, and Ernst Ludwig Gerber affirms that Bach employed in his playing the majority of the "mannerisms" whose meaning Couperin notated.²⁰⁹ Bach adds the table of ornaments to the copy of Dieupart's two suites, and he refers to two harsichordists when he writes an explanation of embellishments for his son Wilhelm Friedemann.²¹⁰ He therefore possessed all the resources of Marchand's artistry, and Marchand's withdrawal from the competition in Dresden at least gives proof of his judgment of Bach's

²⁰⁵ See *Mercure gallant* (December 1682), 386; (January 1683). For Westhoff, I refer the reader to the sources given by Eitner (*Quellen-Lexikon*) and to the study by P. von Bojanowski, *Das Weimar J. S. Bachs* (1903), 14.

²⁰⁶ Life of J. C. Hertel in Marpurge's *Historische-kritische Beyträge*, 3: 51.

²⁰⁷ See the work already cited by Fürstenau, *Zur Geschichte der Musik*.

²⁰⁸ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, I:763.

²⁰⁹ See the article "[François—Trans.] Couperin" in Gerber's *Historische-biographisches Lexikon* cited earlier.

²¹⁰ BWV 836, p. 1.

ability: he had understood that his cause was lost. However, we can ask ourselves if this victory by the German artist was correctly interpreted. Bach's own reputation would be diminished by whatever belittled the Versailles organist too much, and he did not refrain from admiring Marchand or from praising his ability highly.²¹¹ What we miss the most in the tales of Marchand's misfortune that have been handed down to us is a judgment of the feats, rather than the individuals. It was not seen as a triumph for German music, because only the virtuosos' merits were considered, without thinking to compare the arts—however different—that they represented. The Weimar court organist was shown to be more able than the French court organist, and the Germans rejoiced, but they believed they were comparing musicians of the same kind. Bach had carried it off by his florid abundance, but it was his adversary's qualities that he seemed to possess to a more distinguished degree and that had been praised. Had they discovered in Marchand this nearly imperceptible breath of voluptuousness that sometimes floated above his very delicately sensual music—and a sensuality so French? Had the listeners recognized, from seeing him elsewhere, that Bach's "galant" elegance, even in the drawing room, was not just a nice pretense of style for making gracious small talk? Well after the event, Forkel assures us that Marchand would have been dizzy if he had any idea of Bach's thoughts.

But when Bach saw fit to comply with his public, he knew all too well how to charm it to avoid embarrassing himself with all his riches in such circumstances. He had to place his knowledge at the service of not appearing to be learned, and to use every bit of his imagination for thinking ordinary thoughts. The only prerogative left to him, in the presence of these fanciers of superficial art and "pretty little songs,"²¹² was the power to dazzle them with the marvels of his technique and to astonish them with his inexhaustible talent at improvising. With his stunning skill, he had once enraptured Friedrich, crown prince-elect of Cassel, who, after a dazzling and thunderous pedal passage, had given Bach a ring adorned with a precious gem.²¹³ In 1725, through his facility to "play from imagination," he was to captivate the Hamburgians before whom he unfurled, for two hours, the variations his fantasy dictated to him on the chorale *Am Wasserflüssen Babylon* (By the rivers of Babylon).²¹⁴ It is undoubtedly the same opulence and the same power that guaranteed his success over Marchand in Dresden in 1717.

Otherwise, how would it have been surmised that Bach's triumph was the first triumph of German music? Was it even known that a German music exist-ed?

²¹¹ Bach's obituary notice in Mizler's "Nekrolog," *Neu eröffnete musikalische Bibliothek*, 4:165.

²¹² "Die schönen Dresdener Liederchen," Bach said of them to his son, Friedmann (Forkel, *Ueber Bachs Leben*, 48).

²¹³ This prince became king of Sweden in 1720. The anecdote concerning Bach had been reported in a *Programm* dedicated to the praise of music in 1743, by Constantin Bellermann, rector at Minden.

²¹⁴ Obituary notice.

Consider what Marpurg was saying as late as 1754: “The Germans do not have a style of their own in music. But at least our Handel and Telemann come close to the French, as do Hasse and Graun to the Italians.”²¹⁵ In 1737, Joh. Adolf Scheibe wrote: “German music has borrowed the greatest part of its substance from foreign music.”²¹⁶ And even if Lorenz Mizler proclaims the Germans’ superiority in music that same year, he stresses their ability to charm different nations or to ascend as high as the best musicians of other countries—even to succeed at beating them, but with their own weapons. He was content to say only that Handel is loved by the English, and Hasse is preferred by the Italians; that Telemann writes French overtures; that Bach and Handel are excellent clavierists; Weiss, an eminent lutenist, etc. . . .²¹⁷ but not a word is mentioned on the superiority of German music taken by itself. We only find a sequence of examples in this passage—the greatest part of which serves merely to demonstrate that Germany has some polished performers. Mizler only mentions several names to support Johann Behr’s protest, which, near the end of the preceding century, rose against the “steadfast opinion obstinately maintained by the whole world that there were no better instrumentalists than in France.”²¹⁸ Moreover, Volumier, the Dresden kapellmesiter who had begged Bach to come and measure himself against Marchand, did not expect an unfavorable result for French music from this contest, but only one for the French musician. Volumier had acted to his disadvantage by belittling this foreign art, since he had won his reputation by performing it. Even at the Dresden court, it was not doubted that there could be a national art, and it was necessary for the German master par excellence to disguise, under borrowed clothing, his strong and lofty thoughts. Bach’s success proves that he had come to possess to perfection the elegance, the stylishness, the brilliance—in a word, all the alluring qualities of the French clavierists. A coarse imitation would not have yielded the response in his listeners, because the Germans sought for a long time to model themselves after the subjects of the “great king.” As early as 1687, Christian Thomasius wrote: “French dress, French food, French manners, French sins, French maladies, are generally in fashion.”²¹⁹ And did not Madame Duparc tell the elector of Saxony that he seemed “quite French”? Perhaps there was no irony in this compliment, addressed to a prince who copied Louis XIV.²²⁰ The German nobility happily sojourned in Paris, and in the duchess of Orleans’s letters, at whose home her German compatriots had been well received, we find some specific information: “There were twenty-one Germans in my house,” she says in 1699, and, in 1716,

²¹⁵ Marpurg, *Historisch-kritische Beyträge*, 22.

²¹⁶ Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus* (Leipzig: 1745), 147.

²¹⁷ Mizler, *Neu eröffnete musikalische Bibliothek*, pt. 3, 9.

²¹⁸ Behr, *Musikalische Discurse* (1718), 60. The author had been dead since 1700, killed by a clumsy hunter.

²¹⁹ Thomasius, *Von Nachahmung der Franzosen*, 1686 (Leipzig: 1894 ed.), 3.

²²⁰ Karl Biedermann, *Deutschlands geistige, sittliche und gesellige Zustände im 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: 1858), 1:120.

she counted twenty-nine of them of noble birth.²²¹ These distinguished travelers did not miss being instructed by the French musicians, and sometimes they found odd teachers. Titon du Tillet tells us of a certain Du Buisson who, toward the end of the 17th century, “readily gave lessons in music and table manners to foreign ladies and gentlemen—especially the Germans who came to spend some time in Paris.”²²² Some artists of less vulgar fame also distinguished themselves among the Germans. The *Nova Literaria Germaniae* of 1708 announced the clavier pieces by Elisabeth de la Guerre in praise-filled terms.²²³ In 1700, the lutenist Jacques de Saint-Luc²²⁴ had played “with a sweetness that made one nearly fall over with ecstasy” at the wedding feast of the crown prince of Cassel and the electoral princess of Brandenburg. Johann von Besser, who writes of this so admiringly, was a reliable judge, having taken lessons in Paris from “the famous Gallot” in 1686.²²⁵ Among the “personages of high rank” who gathered at the residence of the elector, king of Poland, to attend the duel between Bach and Marchand, the chief judges were, without any doubt, very well informed on the characteristics of the art of French performance. Their confirmation of Bach would suffice to assure us that he knew all its secrets.

Acquaintance with these Works Useful for Studying the Formation of Bach's Expressive Language

The influence of French music shows itself not only in a taste for the pleasant and in the refined performance grace. Some works of loud solemnity were also considered to be monuments of French magnificence. Overtures composed in Lully's style—pompous and striking—were in fullest vogue, and Mattheson wrote in 1713: “Although the Italians take the greatest pains in the world over their symphonies and their concertos—which, most certainly, are extremely beautiful—a French overture is, nevertheless, deemed preferable to all these works. For, with Lully's *Suite à la Française*—apart from the composition of such a piece—the performance that the French give of it is so wonderful, smooth, and steady [Mattheson uses the French terms “admirable, unie, ferme.”—Trans.] that we can place nothing above it.”²²⁶ Bach composed such overtures and suites, and his contemporaries praised their vigor. Christiane Marianne von Ziegler, who declared her predilection for expansive and powerful music—overtures and “things strongly built”—cites him as possibly being the composer of an overture that she heard,

²²¹ Biedermann, *Deutschlands geistige . . .*, 80.

²²² Du Tillet, *Le Parnasse François* (Paris: 1732), 392.

²²³ *Nova Literaria Germaniae*, 141.

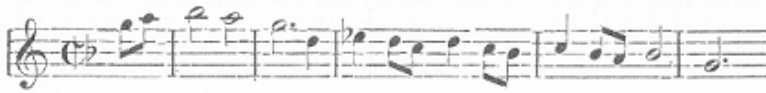
²²⁴ Cited by Ambros in *Geschichte der Musik*, 4:312.

²²⁵ Besser, *Schriefften* (Leipzig: 1732), 71.

²²⁶ Mattheson, *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre*, 226.

whose source she did not know.²²⁷ We must not forget that Bach readily wrote for the clavier, which also indicates to us, particularly by his transcriptions of concertos, that he never disdains the effects of a somewhat massive and nearly brutal full sonority produced by the coupled keyboards and the doubled octaves—on an instrument from which, in our day, we can hardly imagine anything other than the feeble, goatish voice of an old man with frilled cuffs.

I will not insist that Johann Sebastian's compositions present us with a perfect representation of French music. The subject would require an in-depth study that I cannot undertake here. However, it is fitting to note that Bach does not lose sight of the originals while writing these pieces in a style already common in Germany. The care with which he takes in following them, or in reworking them, is revealed by some analogies with rather curious themes. For instance, we can suppose that in forming the motif from the "Gavotte" in the third *English Suite*,²²⁸ he kept in mind this "Marche pour les Pastres" from *Alcide*, published in 1693 under the names of Louis de Lully and Marais (ex. 11.20):



Ex. 11.20. Louis de Lully and Marin Marais, *Alcide*/28, *Marche pour les Pastres*, mm. 1–5.

Lastly, we should note that Bach frequently used a meaningful rhythmic formula very often found in French works—one that delighted the French to such a degree that performers would at times introduce it even in passages where it was not indicated. It is the dotted figure that the master uses when he wants to symbolize confidence or stateliness. Nicolas Gigault says, in the preface to his *Livre de Musique pour l'Orgue* (1685), "One will be able . . . to enliven one's playing by placing the dots more or less where one likes."²²⁹ At the beginning of his allemande entitled "La Laborieuse" (1713), François Couperin recommends playing its "double-dotted eighth notes ever so slightly less dotted" and, in the *Art de toucher le clavecin* (1717), he cites, as one of the imperfections of French musical notation, their custom of not marking the passages as they are performed: "We dot several eighth notes in succession that move by stepwise degrees; and yet we write them as being equal; our custom has enslaved us, and continues to do so" (p. 39).

Thus, in French works, Bach not only finds the general qualities of elegance and "accuratesse" (accuracy)—as his compatriots called it—but he also lays hold of some traits that are suitable for portraying aspects of the soul.

²²⁷ Cited by Spitta in *Historische und philologische Aufsätze* (Berlin: 1884).

²²⁸ BWV 808/5, mm. 1–4.

²²⁹ *Archives des Maîtres de l'Orgue*, pub. by A. Guilmant.

Moreover, this expressive adaptation of musical resources that he acquired can be found in all his imitations. In this same way, he has appropriated the Italians' emphases²³⁰ and their melodic harshness²³¹ in representing obstinate or bitter feelings. And the practice of using 16th-century polyphonic procedures taught him how to handle with perfect freedom the characteristic themes that he links together and that, moreover, proceed, oppose, and join each other without losing anything of their individuality as *dramatis personae*. Thus he merely enriches himself with what others have stated before him, by perfecting it, or by endowing it with a profound meaning: all his study serves, primarily, only to render his language more versatile and intelligible. Ultimately, he acquired the technique of his craft through being fully acquainted with its every detail.

²³⁰ See paragraph 112, chap. 7 of this work.

²³¹ We read in a document published at the end of Lecerf de la Viéville's *Comparaison de la Musique* that the French could not tolerate Buononcini's diminished third.

CHAPTER TWELVE

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH, GERMAN CANTOR

Bach's religion. – Feeling for nature. – Love. – The comedic. – Bach and the style of his times. – Conclusion.

“If we wish to grasp the marvelous uniqueness, strength, and significance of the German spirit through one incomparably eloquent image, we must look piercingly and thoughtfully at the nearly inexplicable phenomenon of the musical wonder that is Sebastian Bach.”¹ This is Richard Wagner pointing out to us the master of Leipzig as the representative of his country's genius, and I would also gladly call him its prophet in a century of eclipse and decline.

In this last chapter, we will try to see how Bach reveals through his life and work that he is profoundly German, and even criticisms by his contemporaries will enlighten us on the subject. These final remarks are necessary for confirming what we have said up to this point because, after having observed so many times that his art was a language, it is fitting to go back to the sources of his eloquence and acknowledge the inspiration and purpose of his speech. We will perceive the motives of his method by studying the characteristics of his soul, and it is precisely through this investigation that we will uncover his ethnic traits. They will be

¹ Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen* (Berlin: 1883), 10:65: “Was ist deutsch.”

revealed to us when we understand what religion, love, nature, and humor were for him.

* * *

Bach's Religion

When Bach was appointed to carry out the cantorial duties at St. Thomas's school in Leipzig (1723) he was questioned on the principles of his faith and had to give written testament of his belief.² All his works, on the other hand, inform us of his devotion, and this devotion does not appear only in the compositions in which he fulfills his duty as church musician. The non-musical testimonies are the least significant: when he inscribes on the first page of a cantata the initials of the dedicatory words "Soli Deo Gloria," he merely follows the general tradition of choirmasters serving Christian congregations. If he inscribes on the title pages of his works the letters J. J. ("Jesu, juva"; Jesus help), he is also being faithful to the decorum of his post. Similar demonstrations of devoutness are not particular to him; we find that seventeenth-century composers make a great display of their devotional mottos: Joh. Rudolph Ahle also puts the words "Juva, o Domine Jesu, juva" (Help, O Lord Jesus, help) at the beginning of his works;³ Hammerschmidt has "A" (alpha) and "Ω" (omega) engraved on his masses;⁴ Heinrich Schütz decorates his music library with a verse from a psalm;⁵ and Johann Kuhnau, Bach's predecessor at Leipzig, ends his scores with "Soli Deo Gloria."⁶ Poets also have such customs, which they acquired in school: for example, we see Caspar von Lohenstein sealing his tragedies with the first letters of "Glory to God" translated into Greek.⁷ In a society where religion plays a part in the qualities of the "honorable man," and in an era when scriptural verses are still carved on the beams of building facades, it would be improper for the cantor of a church not to demonstrate his devoutness overtly. In his youth, Johann Sebastian had been able to witness the severity with which they had smitten his teacher at the Ohrdruf school, the cantor Georg Arnold (1653–98)—dismissed in 1697 because of his

² Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:9.

³ See the *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, no. 1, vol. 5.

⁴ Hammerschmidt, *Missae* (Dresden: 1663). Elsewhere, Zeutschner inscribes "I. N. J." (*In nomine Jesu*; In Jesus's name) above the title of his work from 1661, and N. Niedt decorates the title of his collection from 1698 with the same letters. See also the collections of Frentzel (1655) and Neander (1680).

⁵ Ernst Ludwig Gerber, *Historisch-Biographischer Lexicon der Tonkünstler* (Leipzig: 1790), Geier article.

⁶ Leipzig town library.

⁷ For example, at the end of *Cleopatra*.

negligence, but no doubt especially because he was regarded as a “Godless” man.”⁸ With his black vestment, the cantor was partly of the clergy: so it would have been scandalous if Bach did not assume the manners and demeanor of personages devoted to the service of God. Therefore, I will not consider as very important the tokens of this quasi-official devotion to which he was bound. If he speaks of creating music for celebrating “the glory of God,” and if he deliberately mixes into his works phrases filled with Christian doctrines or reflections, it makes us think of people who, by dint of their having heard preachers, maintain the sermon style even in their everyday conversation. So these turns of phrase are common. Daniel Speer, in his *Trèfle musical à quatre feuilles*, defined music as a liberal art that “belonged to the praise of God.”⁹ When Bach dictated explanations to his pupils on the manner of playing the basso continuo, he taught them that all music has as its “ultimate purpose” (“Endzweck”) the “glory of God and the renewal of the spirit.” But this declaration does not come directly from him: we find it in Friedrich Erhardt Niedt’s *Musicalische Handleitung*, in which Niedt writes up the instructions about the basso continuo attributed later to Bach.¹⁰

The large quantity of religious books contained in Bach’s library is a more certain indication of his taste for sacred matters.¹¹ Furthermore, those who lived near him depict him as a “very devoted man.”¹² Such remarks give more credence to his demonstrations of trust in God and to his prayers and praises: they are obviously sincere and heartfelt. But we would still know very little about Bach’s religious sentiment if we knew only that he practiced with dignity the virtues of the vestment he wore; so we must determine the less superficial qualities of his devotion, and his work as a composer shows them concisely.

Bach is the great preacher of Lutheran doctrine. No composer translates better than he the Reformer’s teachings. Not one feels the dramas of conscience with the same disturbance, and not one displays them with the same force. All the characters of the interior tragedy that Protestantism’s founder has stirred up in his followers come to life again in the works of the Leipzig cantor. The subject is unique, and for the Christian there is not a more serious problem than the matter of salvation. Bach has felt its anguishes, and he has followed its ups and downs with a visionary’s imagination. Certain cantatas deliver up to us the secret of his soul that is obsessed with the fear of God’s severity. Philipp Spitta notes that, in a chorus from one of his first works (1708)—the cantata *Gott ist mein König*¹³—Johann Sebastian interprets with a kind of exaggeration the prayer contained in its words

⁸ See the study already cited by Dr. Friedrich Thomas, *Einige Ergebnisse über Johann Sebastian Bachs Ohrdruffer Schulzeit*, pub. Lucas (1900), 9.

⁹ Speer, *Grundrichtiger . . . Unterricht der musicalischen Kunst* (Ulm: 1697), 1.

¹⁰ F. Niedt, *Musicalische Handleitung* (Hamburg: 1710), pt. 1, chap. 2.

¹¹ Spitta points out several of them (*J. S. Bach*, 2:747).

¹² These are the words of his pupil Kittel.

¹³ BWV 71/6, mm. 1–10 et seq.

“Mayest thou not give the soul of thy turtledoves to the foe.”¹⁴ According to the general feeling of the cantata, this supplication should only be imbued with confidence, but it is translated here with a moaning and somber melody. We would say that the Christian already feels himself abandoned to “the foe” and believes himself unworthy of the succor that he begs for. Likewise, in the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmerniss*, the expression of distress and restlessness achieves the highest peak when the soprano sings “Sighings, tears . . . gnaw at my oppressed heart.”¹⁵ There is no mistaking it, these desperate phrases weep only out of the sorrows of the spiritual life, and they are the lamentations of an avid soul uncertain of grace. But God’s gleam enters into these anxious hearts, and the music brightens and softens. I have already cited a recitative duet passage from the same cantata—*Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*—and I have shown how the master charges himself with rendering palpable, successively, the chaos and darkness consuming the Christian deprived of grace, and then the light that transfigures him as soon as the divine gaze permeates him anew.¹⁶ In the same work, the promise of benediction that accompanies fervent prayer flourishes wonderfully following the words “Wait upon God.” The solo soprano prolongs the note on which she emits the strong syllable of the word “Harre” (wait upon), then the solo tenor takes up the same note an octave lower, and the orchestral bass holds it as a pedal tone after the chorus stops singing. Then, to this low and steady note, a pliant oboe melody responds that soars and gently descends, as if to proclaim the message of mercy and introduce the hymn of thanks.¹⁷ In an earlier work—the cantata *Aus der Tiefen*¹⁸—the oboe undulates similarly, unexpected and assuaging, soon after the singers have sung “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and I hope in his Word.” Such are the alternatives for the Christian of good will: a great number of cantatas represent his alarm when he believes himself deprived of God as well as his gratitude when grace descends upon him.

Nevertheless, however charming these episodes may be, and however powerfully joyful their endings in which the performer sings of “the return to life,” we must acknowledge that the scenes of anguish appear even more strongly inspired. The large outpourings of rapture that celebrate God the comforter do not make us forget the dreadful pages on which the image of the threatening God looms. As with Luther, Bach’s mind is dominated by the idea of the perfect being who will demand a reckoning from man for his imperfection. The same fears roar within both the theologian and the composer, and both want those fears to resound in the outside world for the conversion of their brethren. Listen to the doctor of the Germanic faith: “The words ‘Justus’ (just) and ‘justicia Dei’ (God’s justice) were a thunderbolt in my conscience. I shuddered upon hearing them, and I said to myself:

¹⁴ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:346.

¹⁵ BWV 21/3, mm. 8–13.

¹⁶ See pp. 301–302 of this volume.

¹⁷ BWV 21/6, mm. 28–44.

¹⁸ BWV 131/5, mm. 1–6 et seq.

‘If God is just, he will punish me.’”¹⁹ Next, read the cantata texts in which Bach—born at the foot of Wartburg castle—describes the frights that he is thrown into while awaiting the eternity that God’s judgment will open up to him. Listen, when he comments on Johann Rist’s hymn and combines his stormy music with blustery words and violent images: “O eternity, thou thund’rous word, O sword, which pierces through one’s soul.”²⁰ Look especially at the judgment-day scenes, in which he lets the trumpets ring out in formidable precision with a din that will shatter the world; study the bass recitative from the cantata *Wachet! betet!*,²¹ in which the orchestra evokes the quaking tumult, the gusts, and the frights of the hour just before “judgment day”; sense the harshness of the same clamorings in the recitative from the cantata *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr’ Mensch und Gott*.²² And after that, if you look for the source of this descriptive wrath, this disorder, and this hurricane of impressions, take, in Martin Luther’s writings, the third of his four sermons on part two of chapter fifteen from the first epistle to the Corinthians and compare it with Bach’s tragic harangues, agitated prose, reproaches, battle cries, life-like descriptions, explicit words, grating, creaking syllables and strange lines of sound that ring, whistle, buzz and crackle shrilly, heavily and thunderously beyond all vocabulary, and consider if they do not come from an instinctive power. Listen to these words created to astonish the common listener, and that are invented, moreover, by a man of the people who knows how to speak to them, and, I would readily say, act for them, miming his ideas, performing in scenes, and convincing them through gestures. Then, consider which man shows more reasoning, and also which man shows more expressive will, and perhaps you will conclude by deeming that the real orator—disguised but ordained—is Johann Sebastian, and that the composer—intoxicated from onomatopoeia and shouting—is Martin Luther. There is a sort of Shakespearean frenzy, a delirium of words, in Luther’s sentences that only speak of feelings, and in which the rumble of a great, war symphony resounds. But with the preacher and with the cantor the intention is the same. Both strive to give birth to terror at the sight of the sovereign master who sits in the clouds. But the task is easier for Bach, since his singers have the entire orchestra for supplementing their declamations when they predict God’s vengeance, while Luther, in order to give more vigor to his oration, is carried

¹⁹ See Luther’s treatise *De servo Arbitrio* (ed. 1590, 334, 346). Cf. *Complete Works* (1564), vol. 1.

²⁰ In the opening chorus from the first of the cantatas composed on the chorale *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort! I* (BWV 20), Bach combines the vocal bursts and the uproar in the orchestra in an obviously descriptive manner. In the second cantata composed on the same hymn, the orchestral bass quivers, and it simultaneously symbolizes both the Christian’s terror and the faraway storm that causes his fright. Note again a passage from the cantata *Mein liebster Jesus ist verloren*, where Bach represents the same kind of images from the text (BWV 154/1, mm. 36–43).

²¹ BWV 70/9, mm. 1–8 et seq.

²² BWV 127/4, mm. 1–6 et seq.

beyond an intelligible eloquence and must infuse regular language with the resources of an imitative sonorousness more striking than that of the words. In the sermon, underneath crude but very distinct form, we can also imagine a sort of barbarously realistic music, in which the semi-classic “taratantara” of trumpets clashes with the battle cries and roaring exclamations “pumperlepum, plitz, plitz, schmir, schmir, pumperlepum, kirr, kirr,” etc.²³

These representations of the Almighty’s victory over the sinner arise sometimes with greater elegance in the cantatas. Bach is not content with overexciting our imaginations by shocking our senses, so he addresses our minds: instead of trying to impress us, he suggests and explains. In the first chorus from the cantata *Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht*, his skill shines for enunciating thoughts that at first seem the least suitable for being characterized by music. In this chorus he affirms, with a merciless decisiveness, that “before thee no living being will be justified.” Here, where the description or the drama serves no purpose and every specific allusion to the words would be farcical, it is the substance itself of the phrase that must be expressed, soberly, without gesticulation, but with an authoritative style, like a herald who announces a decree, or like a philosopher who states the principles of his system. Bach also proclaims impassively and severely the verse that condemns all men, and out of a fugue on a rugged theme, he extracts some overwhelming, oracular curses. His composition unfolds with a mechanical regularity and has a superhuman rigidity and indifference. The music remains essentially objective while translating a tenet of the faith. It is not a question here of bowing to the righteous judge but of showing the inevitable severity of his justice. And, just as a certain kind of necessity is demonstrated in the chain of musical phrases, the punishment is likewise inferred from the fateful fault—since God is perfect and only man is guilty. Not only does the motif repeated in the fugue amplify the crushing sentence, but the unflinching development also foretells that punishment will follow sin. Bach uses the logic of his art to expound upon the dreadful warrant inherent in the axioms of his religion. With one stroke, the dialectician, who mercilessly lines up his arguments against Man, acknowledges that he himself also belongs to the race of sinners. The imperturbable prophet minimizes the harshness of his omens, lightly muffling the hard clap of the divine sword that he has brandished, and he deigns to dream of the soul’s stupor, against which he has not ceased to bring the curse. Do not believe, however, that the music softens, that the human groan is mingled with the inflexible reasoning that is unfurled without let-up. Nothing changes in the form of the motifs, but the voices suddenly yield. Usually sparing with dynamic markings, the composer indicates for the chorus to sing “piano,” and soon afterward, “pianissimo.” At this moment, the basses remain silent, and only three parts repeat the formidable phrase “Since no living being will be justified before thee.” In this fading of voices, we can recognize the intent to represent the consternation of the Christian who tries to hide

²³ See August Nebe’s *Zur Geschichte der Predigt* (Wiesbaden: 1879), 2:79.

his tainted soul from God's purity, but, at the same time, the insistence of the judgment theme warns us that no refuge conceals the sinner from the Lord's eyes, which follow him into the darkest retreats. While interpreting a verse from Psalm 143, the cantor has remembered a passage from Psalm 139 that celebrates God's omniscience. As the voices withdraw and nearly die out, the imperious motif will not be silenced, and they will be constrained by submitting to its obsession, murmuring it into this night where they take refuge. However, the decree must soon ring out anew with full force in the fugue's conclusion, and we might almost say that these contrasts in sound have been used by Johann Sebastian for symbolizing the words from Psalm 139: "If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day."

Such allusions from comparing similar texts only spring from a mind whose memories of the Scripture are mingled with every thought, and in order for these correspondences to occur to the composer, he must be familiar with the whole Bible. We recognize the effect here of a thorough study of the holy books, but, for Bach, it is also more a trait of the national religion than a knowledge of the Bible supported by assiduous readings and meditations. Whereas, Heinrich Schütz (1585–1673) had hardly any other occupation in his later years, and Johann Jakob (1598–1673), the last lord of Ribeaupierre, made himself read the Old Testament twice and the New Testament six times over a three-year span.²⁴

The influence of Biblical literature on Bach's imagination reveals itself through many vestiges. The God who towers above his music is the majestic and formidable God of the ancient law. We have seen how, in the cantata *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, the music of the chorale, played by the instruments, surrounds the choir with an indestructible wall,²⁵ and we know with what massive splendor the first chords of the chorus are erected at the beginning of the cantata *Gott der Herr ist Sonn' und Schild*.²⁶

Bach's joys have their source in the feeling of this divine force. If God's might is a cause of terror for the sinner, and if His justice drives the scrupulous Christian to despair, there is, however, an infinite joyfulness for the soul craving perfection when it contemplates a unified sovereign justice and sovereign power. Also, certain pages from the cantatas appear illuminated by a wonderful light. In these, the composer's exaltation corresponds to the rapture of the believer in the face of the being in whom his ideal is complete. Some instrumental works exude a kind of joy that has the same spiritual source, but its manifestation is not as explicit because, in certain pieces, their motifs do not always reveal the character since they do not have a well-established meaning through an association with a specific text.

²⁴ Wilhelm Horning, *Johann Jakob, der letzte Derer von Rappoltstein*, pub. Rappoltsweiler (1890), 17.

²⁵ BWV 80/1, mm. 23–28 et seq. See chapter 5, paragraph 20 of this volume.

²⁶ BWV 79/1, mm. 45–50 et seq.

Bach likes to compose these instrumental works in order to achieve the kind of respite that yields sight of pure ideas. But his philosophy does not permit him to conceive them separately from God. When he meditates and re-immerses himself in the indifferent serenity of long fugues, or in ingenious “canons,” he dedicates the efforts of his reason to imitating the workings of “eternal wisdom.” He seeks to unravel and re-establish within himself the images of “supreme good,” and he tries very hard to hold the blazing rays of the “divine sun” in the mirror of his soul.²⁷ In these compositions that exclude representations of earthly reality, we can discover the quintessence of his mystical dreams and the thread of his meditations. He concludes them by making his way toward God: it is the final journey on his “itinerary.” A few days before his death, he dictated to his son-in-law, Altnikol, an organ chorale—a piece that appears void of all descriptive intention and that maintains a lofty remoteness, and as an epigraph to it, we read “I hereby step before thy throne.” Already parted from the living, Bach sings, in the chorale, of the liberation of his spirit and his joy at leaving the sentient world. When he addresses himself to others, he speaks to them in a language full of images so that they will understand his preaching. But here, in God’s presence, he has no other care than reflecting the barest forms of intelligence. He has come to the supreme manifestation of his doctrine, at the roots of which we find mingled, like a slightly jumbled summary of German theology, the thoughts of the aged Eckhart and Saint Bonaventure and the teachings of Johann Tauler—a master praised by Luther²⁸—whose sermons Bach possessed in his cantor’s library.²⁹

* * *

So dominating everything in Bach’s work, we find the inherited notion that he carries within himself of a God who is law, power, and intelligence. Compared to the perfect being, man, taken by himself, seems an infinity of miseries, and the world an abode of distress and perdition. Look at the energy the composer uses to translate the litany of invectives that poets of the cantatas present to him. How he leans on the words by extending them and emphasizing their base abusiveness! Certain passages have an unforgettable harshness, and I have already cited some recitative fragments in which he furiously declaims the troubling words—with which Biblical language is so rich—to recall the lowliness of created life:³⁰ “Mankind is mud, stench, ashes, and earth”³¹ and “Now the world is a great

²⁷ These are expressions of the German mystic, Heinrich Suso (1300–66).

²⁸ See Luther’s correspondence, published by Weite and Seidemann: *Luther’s Briefe* (Berlin: 1825), 1:34, 36.

²⁹ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:748.

³⁰ See exs. 2.36a–c and related text.

³¹ BWV 47/3, mm. 1–2.

wilderness.”³² Even when he proclaims peace on earth, after having sung “Glory to God in the highest heavens,” the expression of sorrow prevails over the joy that should be born from the promise of blessing, and he opposes the appeasing bass with dissonances in the upper voices and moans in the orchestra.³³ As long as the Christian dwells here below, “storm and waves” disable him,³⁴ for he knows himself to be “a child of sin,”³⁵ bound by “Mammon’s chain,”³⁶ ravaged by “sin’s poison,”³⁷ and he is held captive in “a hospital of sickness and death”³⁸ at the entrance to death’s door. The ever-novel harshness from Bach when he bears down on these phrases, however commonplace they may be, proves to us that he feels their unlimited power. His inventive modulations and his harmonic clashes reveal an impatient candor that roars as soon as the occasion is offered to rant against life and men. Bach’s pessimism bursts forth then, and his saintly rage, which glorifies God, is magnified by all his rancor. Not only does he set himself against the evil “in oneself” that offends the Lord, but his wrath is enlivened by his grievances toward those who constantly hinder him—the cantor—from creating an “orderly music,” a monument of praises in honor of the Most High.

Also, how rapturous is the sweetness he brings to the poems that exalt the day of emancipation! Death is the soul’s repose: “Death has become my sleep,” writes Luther in the hymn *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin* (With peace and joy I depart thither), and this idea never leaves Bach. Each time that the text contains an allusion to death, motifs of drowsiness lull the composition. One word is enough, as in “To die is my reward,” which we read in the second verse of the chorale *Christus, der ist mein Leben* (Christ, he is my life). In the chorus based on the melody of this hymn—at the beginning of the cantata bearing the same title—the voices prolong the chords joined to the syllables of “sterben” (death), and the bass proceeds in peacefully cadenced even notes.³⁹ Death only has to be evoked in the course of an aria or recitative for the calm sequence of notes to appear.⁴⁰ Sometimes entire pieces are pulsed by the murmur of low instruments heralding slumber. Among many examples, I will only cite a wonderful aria, full of ardent desire for the grave’s peace: “Schlummert ein, ihr matten Augen” (Fall asleep, ye weary eyes). Bach acquaints us with his predilection for this canticle of dying,

³² BWV 186/7, mm. 1–2.

³³ *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/21, mm. 25–31.

³⁴ Cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21/5, mm. 24–28.

³⁵ Cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele*, BWV 78/3, mm. 1–2.

³⁶ Cantata *Tue Rechnung!*, soprano and alto duet, BWV 168/5, mm. 5–16.

³⁷ Cantata *Ich elender Mensch*, alto recitative, BWV 48/2, mm. 1–4.

³⁸ Cantata *Es ist nichts Gesundes in meinem Leibe*, tenor recitative, BWV 25/2, mm. 1–6.

³⁹ BWV 95/1, mm. 21–26 (first chorus).

⁴⁰ See exs. 5.26a, b and related text. Also see the cantatas BWV 125/2, mm. 13–17 et seq.; BWV 127/3, mm. 9–12 et seq.; BWV 133/5, mm. 7–11; BWV 157/3, mm. 82–85.

which we find in Anna Magdalena Bach's music book⁴¹ and in the cantata *Ich habe genug*.⁴² I also point out the sinfonia that precedes the cantata *Gottes Zeit*, in which the violas da gamba so gently repeat the consonances, luminous and full of charm.⁴³

Everything is dear that speaks to Bach of death. The hideous sight of a decomposed body does not frighten him. Like the old German painters, he readily accepts the spectacle of wasted and gnawed flesh. Somewhere, even Martin Luther jokes at the thought of the feast that worms will enjoy from his "fat doctor's" corpse.⁴⁴ At the end of the cantata *Komm, du süsse Todesstunde*, Johann Sebastian uses a tortuous and almost ironic motif in the flute to illustrate the chorale "Indeed, the body in the earth is consumed by worms." Without a doubt, he has considered the odious image complacently. Moreover, the continuous pattern that he lays out for the flute evolves along the lines of those that he develops in other works for portraying a serpent's undulations.⁴⁵ And we are acquainted with the hymns that, to him, evoke the death knell.⁴⁶ One of his cantatas, accompanied in the orchestra by a "campanella" (small bell), is nothing other than a cordial invitation to death.⁴⁷ The tenor aria from the cantata *Christus, der ist mein Leben* expresses the same desire for the final "hour."⁴⁸ He passionately addresses this hour when he will be reborn, even in the compositions in which he preaches about it from high up in the organ loft where, without addressing himself directly to the Christian congregation, he translates into music, for himself and for them, the thoughts that he holds most lovingly in his soul.⁴⁹

Thus, directed toward God and tired of earthly life, Bach professes a devotion to Jesus Christ in which compassion is united with respect. He renders unto Christ the reverence owed to the mediator who is stationed between the judge and the guilty, and his devoutness softens at the memory of the human pains that the Savior has endured. He reckons that he would not know a better way to prove his gratitude to Christ than by showing himself afflicted by his own pains. I have already cited an example of this delicacy of heart in the cantata *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*

⁴¹ *Notenbüchlein für Anna Magdalena Bach* (1725), *Bach Gesellschaft*, vol. 43², no. 34/2, mm. 1–4 et seq., and no. 38, mm. 1–4 et seq.

⁴² BWV 82/3, mm. 10–13 et seq.

⁴³ BWV 106/1, mm. 1–8 et seq.

⁴⁴ Letter from 1546.

⁴⁵ See the cantata *Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes* (BWV 40/4, mm. 17–24 et seq.) and *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege* (BWV 213/9, mm. 89–112).

⁴⁶ Chapter 8 of this volume.

⁴⁷ *Schlage doch, gewünschte Stunde* (BWV 53/1, mm. 31–39 et seq.). [This cantata was probably composed by Georg Melchior, according to Melvin P. Unger, *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 183.—Trans.]

⁴⁸ BWV 95.

⁴⁹ See the melodies in *Notenbüchlein für Anna Magdalena Bach*, vol. 43².

I,⁵⁰ and we find another even more obvious testimony in the *Christmas Oratorio*: at the moment the evangelist is going to tell the faithful that Jesus is born, Bach has the chorus sing Paul Gerhardt's hymn "How shall I receive thee?" But instead of singing it to Teschner's melody, with which it is usually associated, he borrows the melody of a chorale from around the time of the Passion: "O Lord with blood and wounds." He links the first hour of the Messiah's life to His last—only within which His sacrifice will be complete.

Traces of this worship of Christ's suffering are found in the devotional life of the Middle Ages. Paul Gerhardt's hymn that Bach so readily repeats⁵¹ is drawn from a series of poems in which the German writer imitates the seven parts of Saint Bernard's work *Rhythmica oratio ad unum quodlibet membrorum Christi patientis et a cruce pendentis* (Rhythmic prayer to the sacred limbs of Jesus hanging upon the cross). Individual meditation under pietism's influences must turn itself more and more toward the image of torture that the early German masters had once painted with such a moving realism. Standing before these striking depictions, Bach's contemporaries recognized the same feelings that had inspired their creators. On seeing the *Ecce homo* in Dusseldorf, Zinzendorf (1700–60)—the godson of Philipp Jakob Spener, apostle of the "Christian awakening" (1635–1705)—acknowledged being profoundly struck and "incapable" of responding as he should to the question addressed to him by the sorrowful effigy: "Hoc fecit pro te, quid facis pro me?" (He did this for thee, what art thou doing for me?).⁵² Johann Sebastian therefore coincides with the reformers through his fervent sympathy for Jesus crucified, but his affection comes from farther away. How could he not unite himself personally and fraternally with Christ's sufferings when he knows so well the value of this devotion that makes Christ born "poor"⁵³ among men to die on the cross, the victim of men's sins? He sees Christ like Lucas Cranach shows Him in his painting at the church in Weimar: the lamb of God, conqueror of the monster from hell, nailed to the cross, his body streaked with red welts. He sees the crimson stream that the painter shows gushing from Christ's side—this stream of blood that, as he relates it to himself while describing it, expunges the guilty soul's debt and forgives.⁵⁴ He had read enough mystical books and had pondered long enough—in his apprenticeship pilgrimages at the foot of the naked and bloody statues of Christ that watched over German churches⁵⁵—to preserve within him the

⁵⁰ Chapter 2, paragraph 58 of this volume.

⁵¹ We find it in the *St. Matthew Passion*, in the *Christmas Oratorio* (the second time in the major mode), and in the cantatas *Es ist nichts Gesundes; Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder*; etc.

⁵² On Zinzendorf, consult the article by Ch. Pfender (*Encyclopédie des Sciences religieuses*, vol. 12).

⁵³ *Christmas Oratorio*, chorale "Er ist auf Erden kommen arm" (BWV 248/7).

⁵⁴ See the tenor aria "Dein Blut, so meine Schuld durchstreicht" from the cantata *Jesu, der du meine Seele* (BWV 78/4).

⁵⁵ It is unnecessary here to recall the well-known works: the doleful figures, naively jeered at, with offensively realistic colors, telling everywhere of man's debt to the "mediator." We

figure of the innocent “expiator” as engraved through the centuries. The great movement of sentimental rebirth of conscience—prepared by Spener—had already been imparted to Bach: German art and poetry had supported a frame of mind in him that had been held by his fervently Christian ancestors and carried into the practices of personal devotion.⁵⁶ Also, we can understand how, though a pietist at heart, he declared himself, through public deeds, against the sect of pietism, whose best inspiration he possessed without needing to surrender himself to its exaggerations.

Other things distanced him from the pietist element. During his stay at Mühlhausen (1707–08), he had undoubtedly suffered from the intractable middle-class strictness of this Thuringian town. Moreover, we must acknowledge that the incidents of his last months there were affected by the rugged austerity thrust upon the inhabitants. When the counselors of the Saint-Blaise parish gathered on 14 June 1707 to listen to Bach’s audition, some of them did not appear because, two weeks earlier, their houses had been destroyed by a fire that ravaged the finest part of the town. When the representative from the church brought them the record of the deliberations and requested them to sign the report of the meeting held in their absence these homeless counselors told him that they had no more ink or pens and that “because of the catastrophe, they were so overwhelmed that they could in no way think of music.”⁵⁷ Less affected by the scourge, the other notables of the town did not consider the art much more sympathetically than these to whom the “hand of God” had so cruelly shown the meaninglessness of human matters. They knew, through the words of Spener propagated among them, that one must not “love the world” nor that which is “in the world,” and for many of these serious men, music bordered on being one of the dangerous vanities of the century. Johann Georg Ahle—son of the organist whom Bach aspired to succeed—had published, in an appendix to the music method written by his father, criticisms by “several theologians against the style of today’s concerts.” His work had appeared in Mühlhausen in 1704; however, he does not go as far as recalling Mithobius’s verdicts in *Psalmodia Christiana* (1665) that condemn “the chromatic style, the voluptuous, frivolous, and too ornate manner of the vocal and instrumental parts, the too frequent and conspicuous ‘coloratures’ (large melismas), or the strange

find them in nearly all the museums, but I point out, in particular, the painted sculptures at Eisenach and Lübeck. Moreover, the types imagined by the Germans are found in all the northern countries. For example, see the *Ecce homo* in the museum at Åbo; and in the steeple of the church at Ulfsby (Finland), I have found, abandoned, a very moving head of Christ rendered similarly that should have been in a museum collection.

⁵⁶ Spitta tells us that J. G. Olearius, in his funeral elegy for Heinrich Bach (1615–92), praised the exemplary devotion of this musician, who, through a kind of touching charity, took upon himself the task of accompanying the poor or abandoned dead to the cemetery (*J. S. Bach*, 1:31, 32).

⁵⁷ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:852.

lines”⁵⁸ But to some censures that are just as old and conceived in the same spirit as these of Mithobius, Ahle adds other, newer ones that are constructed even more specifically to impress his pietist compatriots. So we see him cite a comment from Spener’s *Pia Desiderata*—a comment in which the author deplores that chamber music, full of embroideries, has been introduced into the churches. This singing, or rather “these bursts of laughter from Italian eunuchs,” distracts from meditation, “often mingles the temporal with the spiritual, and adulterates the precious gold of the solemn divine truth.” Next, he quotes Dante,⁵⁹ who wants to outlaw these vain “nightingales”—whose “Gloria in excelsis deo” is “for themselves and not for God”—and who is exasperated by “the new and ridiculous Italian capers” and by their “siren songs that do not have the goal of inspiring the spiritual joy of the heart, but the sensual and worldly joy.” The name of Theophilus Grossgebauer, author of *Wächterstimme* (1661), whose judgment is the same, also appears in this indictment, and the entire opinion of Johann Muscovius is represented there because J. G. Ahle assumes that Muscovius’s treatise (*Gestraffer Missbrauch der Kirchen-Musik*, 1694) is little known to musicians. To better confound the lovers of an out-of-place art, Muscovius invokes Aristotle as a witness: “How would this pagan judge the Christians’ actual church music if he very often heard it only as a burst of laughter from the congregation of ordinary faithful, especially on the great holy days? Sometimes someone sings melismas at the expense of a broken-up text, or does some humming, while a little boy starts to whine or crow like a young rooster, while the whole flock shouts on the same beat like a hunting party, or while the violins, reeds, tympani, and trumpets resound all around . . . , so much so that one does not make out a single word of the text nor knows not why there is this din and these sniggers.”⁶⁰

These criticisms, published by one of their own, had certainly resonated in the minds of Mühlhausen notables. When, a year after the appearance of J. G. Ahle’s dissertation, they heard, on 28th October 1705, the *Serenata*, *Concerto*, and *Marche* that Philipp Heinrich Erlebach, Kapellmesiter for the count of Rudolstadt, had composed for the *Actus homagialis* sent by the “ruling city” to Joseph I, they could still tolerate this murmuring mixture of instruments and voice⁶¹ destined for a political celebration. But, to be sure, the purists would discover many scandalous features in the sacred cantata that Bach wrote in 1708 for the renewal of the

⁵⁸ Hector Mithobius, *Psalmodia Christiana* (Jena: 1665), 269.

⁵⁹ We should not forget that J. E. Dannhauer (1603–66), who was rector at the Strasbourg Münster cathedral, had P. J. Spener for a disciple.

⁶⁰ Johann Rudolph Ahle, *Kurze, doch deutliche Anleitung zu der lieblich- und löblichen Singekunst*, ed., aug., corrected by Johann Georg Ahle (Mühlhausen: 1704), 81–82. I thank Dr. Jordan, librarian at Mühlhausen who, at the time of my passage through this town, kindly wished to help in my research and produced for me the very rare edition of this work.

⁶¹ This composition, in which we find a remarkable fugal passage in the *Concerto* (composed for the religious ceremony), is preserved in the *Hochschule für Musik* in Berlin. I possess a copy of it.

council. All that Muscovius disapproves of in his pleading against the too “luxuriant” works appears in this sacred cantata—*Gott ist mein König*. What to say about this fanfare of three trumpets, whose audacious motifs the oboes and then the flutes repeat?⁶² What to think of the tumult in the strings that suddenly buzzes amidst glaring chords like a swarm of bees around an army in battle formation? How to allow for the incoherencies of the broken phrases, and the repeated, stammering words? What an impertinence to fling the voices in pursuit of each other by unleashing the pack of successive melismas! This course of notes, this continual repetition of useless syllables, this variety, these surprises,⁶³ and lastly, this mobility and this shimmering—are they suitable for a “judiciously ordered divine service”? Is it not preposterous to imitate the bill and coo of turtledoves in the accompaniment—a crass musical translation of biblical images? Would one not believe that the organist of St. Blasius Church intends to disrupt the Christians’ sensible discourse with the absurd chirping of birds from the fields?

Whereas Bach did his utmost to enrich religious music and sought to render it stronger and more brilliant so that it proclaims “the glory of God” through its wonders, the Mühlhausen pietists could only reprimand this independent and invasive art that existed for itself and submerged everything else. The lofty religious meaning and the powerful exhortation of these colorful and active works remained masked in their timid minds: they did not conceive singing in the church to be anything other than a slow prayer, without gestures or images. In 1794, it was noted again in the town chronicles that J. Georg Ahle had composed a hymn in the year 1704 to consecrate the St. Mary Magdalene Church.⁶⁴ To gain the favor of the Mühlhausen bourgeoisie, Bach would have needed to limit himself to similarly modest writing. According to what he wrote in his letter of resignation in 1708, we can understand that his too grandiose attempts had been badly received.⁶⁵ It seems that the only encouragement he found was from the pietists’ enemy—the St. Mary Church pastor, Georg Christian Eilmar. Since Eilmar’s arrival in the town (1699), he was involved in a struggle with J. A. Frohne, superintendent of the St. Blasius Church who espoused Spener’s ideas. Spitta reports the principal episodes of this dispute, in which Eilmar battled pedantically and dogmatically.⁶⁶ It suffices to show the tone of this theological quarrel by citing the title of a short treatise published by Frohne’s adversaries in 1704: a document entitled *L’Anatomie de la chauve-souris piétiste* (The anatomy of the pietist bat) and offered for sale by the bookseller Michael Keiser.⁶⁷ Bach shows his friendly relations with the St. Blasius

⁶² BWV 71/1, mm. 1–4. “Animoso” is indicated on the score.

⁶³ See the first chorus. We find there some repetitions of words (*Gott ist, Gott ist*, etc. BWV 71/1, mm. 5–7).

⁶⁴ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:353.

⁶⁵ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:372.

⁶⁶ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:355.

⁶⁷ Eilmar, *Anatomia der pietistischen Fledermaus* (Mühlhausen: Käyser, 1704) (Library of the history of French Protestantism, no. 597).

Church pastor's antagonist through two important facts: the beautiful cantata *Aus der Tiefen*⁶⁸ was composed at Eilmar's request, and, in 1708, Bach asked this champion of orthodoxy to be godfather of his first born, Katharina Dorothea, who came into this world in Weimar on 27th December.⁶⁹ Moreover, in his works Johann Sebastian vigorously proclaims his bias for being an ordinary Christian. Spitta notes that certain pages contain, so to speak, Bach's profession of faith: for Spitta, the cantata *Erforsche mich, Gott, und erfahre mein Herz* (Search me, God, and know my heart)⁷⁰ and the cantata *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*⁷¹ declare the composer's devotion to established doctrine.⁷² I add that in the cantata *Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein*⁷³ he interprets with a deeply significant stress the words of condemnation against those who commit heresy and against the leaders of sects. However, in spite of his obvious opposition to the pietism that threatened religious art, Bach could not entirely escape this renewal of Christian individualism. In his library, with theological works holding a prominent place, were found a book by Spener (*Eifer wider das Papstthum*; Zeal against the papacy) and a book by Francke (*Hauss-Postilla*; Homilies).⁷⁴ Several passages from his compositions also show us that he did not reject certain forms of the language of these modern "friends of God": in the cantata *Ich freue mich in dir*⁷⁵ he includes the diminutive words contained in the chorale by Kaspar Ziegler (1621–90) in the tender and familiar form spoken to "little Jesus" ("Jesulein") who has become a child in order to be our little brother ("Brüderlein"). Bach even stresses the last words in the tenor recitative where the endearing entreaty "mein Jesulein" (my little Jesus) is laid out with a gentle emphasis.⁷⁶

As I have already noted, Bach's instinctive devotion and his desire for "living in God"⁷⁷ are shown through many traits that seem to stem from pietism and which, truthfully speaking, belong to old German mysticism or else are merely the signs of a profound religious sensitivity. This disposition of heart puts him in accord with all the theologians who have loved their God "in reality," and he merely creates according to their teachings: intuiting their meaning is enough to enable him to carry them out. When he writes his wonderful communion chorales for organ—*Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele* (Adorn thyself, O dear soul),⁷⁸ and *Jesus*

⁶⁸ BWV 131.

⁶⁹ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:361.

⁷⁰ BWV 136.

⁷¹ BWV 102.

⁷² Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:255.

⁷³ BWV 2/3, mm. 8–21 et seq.

⁷⁴ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:749.

⁷⁵ BWV 133.

⁷⁶ BWV 133/3, 10–11.

⁷⁷ Note how he treats this passage from Saint Paul in the *Actus tragicus*, for which he has undoubtedly fashioned the text himself by juxtaposing scriptural excerpts.

⁷⁸ BWV 654.

Christus, unser Heiland (Jesus Christ, our Savior)⁷⁹—he surrenders to inspiration. He would not know how to write otherwise than with self-communion and fervor. Mithobius's earlier explanation of the organists' duty when playing during this solemn act does not pertain to Bach.⁸⁰ At this moment in the service, in spite of his liking for Italian concertos, Bach never brings fantasy into it like the organist whom Voigt describes as "pulling out all the stops and executing a concerto with gusto in such a way that people could set themselves to dancing."⁸¹ Undoubtedly, Bach had unhappily received the strange prelude to a motet attributed to Bernhard that Matthias Weckmann had created in Hamburg,⁸² and if he had heard the famous organs of Trent, whose very secular music was readily admired by travelers, he was outraged.⁸³

Through his respectful and ingenious use of the chorale, Bach also proves his fidelity to Lutheran and German tradition. German protestants' attachment to their hymns was well known, and at the beginning of the 17th century, the subjects of Moritz, landgrave of Hesse-Cassel, would resist ordinances from their sovereign, who wished to replace Luther's hymns with Lobwasser's Calvinist psalms, and there were some bloody disturbances in Cassel and Marburg. One day, the lady-in-waiting to the princess at Versailles heard, while passing through a castle arcade, a German worker singing a chorale as he worked away, and she could not hold back her tears. In the cantatas, it is the chorale that unites this nearly theatrical art form to the popular creed, and the congregation sang it with the musicians.⁸⁴ For Bach, the chorale has an extraordinary expressive power. He is content to allow the hallowed melodies to resonate in a chorus, in the middle of a rectitative, or during an aria so that, overshadowing everything else, they burst forth like the voice of God with His promises⁸⁵ or His threats,⁸⁶ and, even without words, stir up an infinity of thoughts. We have seen elsewhere what exactitude and devotion he puts in his interpretations when he writes the organ chorale preludes.⁸⁷ His earliest attempts at composing were undoubtedly some verses on hymn-tunes,⁸⁸ and the

⁷⁹ BWV 665.

⁸⁰ Mithobius, *Psalmodia Christiana*, 312.

⁸¹ Johann Carl Voigt, *Gespräch von der Musik, Zwischen einem Organisten und Adjuvanten* (Erfurt: 1742), 4.

⁸² He played a "bataille" (battle) that surprised the listeners, to whom a motet had been announced on *Weine nicht* (Do not cry); they understood the allusion when the bass suddenly intoned "Es hat überwunden der Löwe vom Stamm Juda" (The lion of Judah hath prevailed) (Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, 21).

⁸³ Maximilien Misson, *Nouveau Voyage d'Italie* (1731), 150.

⁸⁴ See Adlung's *Anleitung zu der musikalischen Gelahrtheit* (Erfurt: 1758), 665.

⁸⁵ *Magnificat* (BWV 243/11), *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren* (BWV 10/5, mm. 9–28).

⁸⁶ *Wachet! betet!* (BWV 70/8, mm. 4–10 et seq.).

⁸⁷ See chapter 10.

⁸⁸ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:250.

models that he recommends to his favorite pupils are from pieces of this popular and religious genre.⁸⁹

In making these choices, he proceeds like most German teachers who traditionally drilled beginners by first having them play chorales. Daniel Speer decided that, “as one needs to undertake with God all honorable things and the good liberal arts,” it is fitting for beginning composers to dedicate their first efforts to the Lord.⁹⁰ Niedt also alludes to this practice.⁹¹ Such a method prepared young composers for easily realizing chords above a basso continuo, and it combined their study with the household creed of their parents. In fact, in protestant family life the singing of hymns formed the most beloved and consoling part of communal prayer. Certain collections of harmonized chorales were designed to help inexperienced accompanists to participate in these gatherings for worship: Speer published a large number of hymns with bass in 1692;⁹² Esaías Reussner offered one hundred melodies arranged for lute in 1676;⁹³ and from 1716 to 1719, J. S. Beyer brought out three books of diverse chorales for the church or home.⁹⁴

This German piety, nourished around the hearth, showed itself not only in songs of religious character but also in ones of a freer religious inspiration: Johann Fischer and Johann Wolfgang Franck have left some very beautiful works of this sort.⁹⁵ In Anna Magdalena Bach’s music-book (1725) we find some admirable spiritual “lieder” in which Johann Sebastian seems to write all his own prayers to bring them before God.⁹⁶ When writing such songs, the cantor no longer had to satisfy the demands of his post, but he obeyed the stirrings of his heart. Perhaps these simple and profound compositions show most distinctly what the master preserves from his Thuringian heritage, in which everyone is born a musician and thrives on church hymns that adhere to an ideal of a calm and open harmony.⁹⁷ In their chorales, the organists of this region show well their compatriots’ taste for a

⁸⁹ They attentively follow his precepts with regard to expression. It is interesting to compare a chorale by Vogler (1696–1765) with Bach’s chorale *O Mensch, beweine dein’ Sünde gross*. If there were more continuity in Vogler’s progression of voices and less uniformity in his harmonic progressions, we would believe it to be by Bach (vol. 9 of the organ works, ed. Peters).

⁹⁰ Speer, *Grundrichtiger, kurz- . . .*, 46.

⁹¹ F. Niedt, *Musicalische Handleitung* (pt. 1, introduction).

⁹² Daniel Speer, *Choralgesangbuch auf das Clavier oder Orgel* (Stuttgart: Lorbeer, 1702).

⁹³ Reussner, *Hundert geistliche Melodien evangelischer Lieder, welche, so wol in der christlichen Gemeine, also auch daheim gesungen worden* (1676).

⁹⁴ Beyer, *Musikalischer Vorrath, neu variierter Fest-Choral-Gesänge auf dem Clavier, in Canto und Basso* (Freiburg: 1716–19).

⁹⁵ I have already cited Fischer. J. W. Franck’s *Geistliche Lieder* were composed on the words of H. Elmenhorst and published after 1681.

⁹⁶ *Bach Gesellschaft*, vol. 43², pp. 30–49.

⁹⁷ In the preface to his *Neue und zierliche Intradan mit 6 Stimmen*, Mich. Altenburg writes, in 1620, that music is practiced, and flourishes in the most humble of Thuringian parishes.

modest art without great elegance but one that is profoundly contemplative and not devoid of charm.⁹⁸

The masters who appear in the Bach family during the 17th century bequeathed to Johann Sebastian some models in this genre that were easy to imitate technically but whose inspiration could only be reborn in a soul smitten with hallowed poetry. They also transmitted to him this passion for religious music that carried them along the roads of their province, eager to hear the organists in the towns of the region. And we must not forget that Bach undertook his greatest study trips in order to hear these organists. During his stay at Lüneburg, he went several times to Hamburg, where Johann Adam Reinken played at Saint Catherine's Church. Not content with assimilating "the works of Bruhns, Reinken, Buxtehude, and several good French organists,"⁹⁹ he wanted to know more closely the most eminent of these composers—Dietrich Buxtehude—and, from Arnstadt, he set out on foot for Lübeck, where he stayed for several months listening to the celebrated musician.

Through these pilgrimages Bach gave proof of artistic discernment, and he categorically reveals his preference for German organ music.¹⁰⁰ Such efforts and such persistence are the express marks of his calling. In his youth he was not drawn toward northern Germany by the Hamburg theatre even though he certainly liked Keiser's works, and the expressive and colorful spirit of this master of the stage charmed him enough that he sometimes wrote in the same style.¹⁰¹ But he always seems to maintain some prejudice against opera, and we might say that he considered it an inferior art form. In fact, he accompanied his son to opera performances in Dresden, but, to him, the arias that one heard there—even though he was sometimes inspired by them—were only "pretty little songs."¹⁰² His evaluation includes something of the disdainful indulgence shown by a builder, with regard to elegant ornamental trifles, who is very capable of constructing vast and complicated edifices. Ultimately, perhaps we might discover in him a sort of distrust for and uneasiness with opera. This man of the church does not ignore that it can "become a very powerful instrument for steering the common folk," and he knows that it is very difficult to avoid the subjects of abuse and scandal while

⁹⁸ See the book already cited by A. G. Ritter, *Zur Geschichte des Orgelspiels*.

⁹⁹ Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *Ueber Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig: 1802).

¹⁰⁰ At the beginning of the century, Niedt acknowledged that German organists do not yield much to foreigners "when they do not surpass them in certain things" (*Musicalische Handleitung*, pt. 1, introduction, § 22). A little later, Nemeitz grants the upper hand to German organists who "greatly surpass the French" in his *Séjour de Paris* (Leiden: 1727), 71.

¹⁰¹ He copied and had performed a *Marcus Passion* by Keiser (Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:339, 811). We have also noted earlier that he employed some orchestration procedures frequently associated with Keiser.

¹⁰² Forkel, *Ueber Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke*.

handling it.¹⁰³ He certainly knew of the attacks by theologians against opera,¹⁰⁴ and perhaps he had even heard talk of the sermon that J. W. Petersen, superintendent of the Lüneburg diocese, delivered against the theatre “at the time when God had created signs and miracles with his righteousness through a fire at the Copenhagen opera house.”¹⁰⁵ While he studied at Lüneburg, Bach definitely went to Hamburg several times, where his cousin Johann Ernst could help him gain access to the society of theatre musicians, but it didn’t seem that he had sought out occasions to know these people who must have appeared frivolous and haughty to him. If he had felt the same passion for opera music that he had for organ music he easily would have found employment in the Hamburg orchestra and he would have remained there. Too poor to pay the demi-thaler that was demanded at the door,¹⁰⁶ he would have engaged himself as violinist or clavierist as did some famous musicians who had served their apprenticeship on the Hamburg stage; from 1690 to 1705 Johann Mattheson sang there, having debuted in a secondary role at the age of nine before becoming one of the principal performers and, at the same time, an applauded composer.¹⁰⁷ Mattheson tells us that it is there, during the summer of 1703, that Handel came to learn the way of writing arias that were not inordinately long and nearly without melody like his first attempts.¹⁰⁸ Several years later, in 1707, Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel must have been delighted to have acquired, at the Leipzig opera, the power of moving his listeners at will, often having been stirred himself by the pieces played there.¹⁰⁹ In 1709, Johann Kuhnau complained about seeing the best pupils at St. Thomas’s school letting themselves be led astray by the theatre directors.¹¹⁰ If Bach had felt the least proclivity for opera, he easily would have begun a lucrative career without even needing to appear on the stage himself. But out of conscious scruples he probably rejected any idea of participating in productions that the prudent Christians disapproved of or allowed only with mistrust.

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¹⁰³ See in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (1882), 753, Leibniz’s judgment of opera—a judgment from which I borrow the passage cited between quotation marks.

¹⁰⁴ On these disputes, read O. Lindner’s work *Zur Tonkunst* (1864).

¹⁰⁵ The fire occurred in 1689, according to Karl Theodor Gaedertz, *Archivalische Nachrichten über die Theaterzustände von Hildesheim, Lübeck, Lüneburg im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Bremen: 1888), 115.

¹⁰⁶ Christian Friedrich Hunold, *Die Manier höflich und wohl zu reden und zu leben* (Hamburg: 1710).

¹⁰⁷ Heinrich Schmidt, *Johann Mattheson, ein Fördere der deutschen Tonkunst, im Lichte seiner Werke* (Leipzig: 1897), 5.

¹⁰⁸ Mattheson, *Grundlager einer Ehren-Pforte*, 93.

¹⁰⁹ Mattheson, *Grundlager einer Ehren-Pforte*, 344.

¹¹⁰ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:858. Kuhnau had complained before, in 1704 (same vol., p. 854).

Feeling for Nature

German in his serious and long-standing religion, Bach also reveals to us another of the characteristic feelings of the Germanic soul through his interpretations of nature. Although he had read Tauler's¹¹¹ sermons, he follows well the example proposed by the preacher when he shows us a holy man "who covers his head with a hood when going outside in May for fear that the trees of the fields will prevent him from beholding his soul."¹¹² Bach listens more readily to Luther, who preaches to the plowman to make a bible for himself out of his field,¹¹³ who speaks rapturously of the sunrise, of "the dear and joyous aurora" at whose start "all the birds sing,"¹¹⁴ and who chooses, in favor of the humble and small, his most beautiful similes in the book available to everyone.¹¹⁵ It is there, in the natural world, that Bach seeks the signs of God most accessible to man: he undoubtedly grants, like Jacob Böhme, that "creation is nothing other than the manifestation of the infinite and ever-present God."¹¹⁶ But Bach gives this idea an immediate meaning: sentient phenomena communicate messages to him from the invisible Creator. When he prolongs his descriptions he thinks of representing the phases of spiritual life very distinctly to us. If Luther evokes winter's days that prepare the resurrection of the soul buried in the earth while awaiting summer "when the seed will bear fruit," and if he says that this transformation will create, through the effect of "the rain, sun, and wind—that is to say, the Word—the sacraments and the Holy spirit,"¹¹⁷ Bach writes an ingenious "sinfonia" inspired by this verse from Isaiah: "For as the rain and the snow cometh down from heaven and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and make it bring forth and bud . . . So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth, etc." Note, moreover, that in translating these words of the Hebrew prophet, he adds one of the Reformer's images to his commentary. One of the motifs in the introduction to the cantata created on this text could be designated in Bach's works under the title of "wind motif" (ex. 12.1a), for he employs it when it is a question of the storm (ex. 12.1b) or even the "gentle breeze" that blows from heaven (ex. 12.1c).

¹¹¹ We know through Spitta that he owned the sermons by this Dominican, often cited and praised by Luther (*J. S. Bach*, 2:748).

¹¹² Sermon for the fourth Sunday of Advent (*Sermons de Jean Tauler*, translated by Ch. Saint-Foi).

¹¹³ Cited by Otto Zöckler, *Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Theologie und Naturwissenschaft* (Gutersloh: 1877), 586.

¹¹⁴ See August Nebe's *Zur Geschichte der Predigt* (Wiesbaden: 1879), 2:56.

¹¹⁵ Nebe, *Zur Geschichte der Predigt*, 2:25.

¹¹⁶ See the preface and first chapters of Böhme's *Aurora*.

¹¹⁷ Cited by A. Biese, *Die Entwicklung des Naturgefühls im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit* (1888), 255.



Ex. 12.1a. *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt*, BWV 18/1, mm. 3–5.



Ex. 12.1b. *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*, BWV 12/6, mm. 1–8.



Ex. 12.1c. *Erschallet ihr Lieder*, BWV 172/5, mm. 1–3.

In two other cantatas, Bach shows us that, like Luther, he has adapted “the wonder of the clouds that float above us” without abating “but greet us with a somber face and fly away”¹¹⁸: the uniform motifs in the first and second violins pursue each other indefinitely while the soprano sings “Lord, thy kindness extends as far as the heavens, and thy truth reaches as far as the clouds go”¹¹⁹ or while the tenor declaims “Lord, thy name’s renown reaches to the clouds.”¹²⁰ He has also gazed lengthily at this other miraculous spectacle that Luther admires in the same letter from 5 August 1530: “the stars of the sky, and the beauteous divine dome” that hold themselves up without any support. In the first chorus from the cantata *Herr Christ, der einge Gottes-sohn*,¹²¹ in which the Savior is compared to the morning star, the violino piccolo and the flauto piccolo play the radiating motifs that sometimes sparkle above the voices and sometimes open out like sheets of light during the interludes. In the first chorus from the cantata based on Philipp Nicolai’s chorale *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*,¹²² the violino concertante repeats some similar bright and vibrant roulades.

¹¹⁸ Letter of 1530 to Chancellor Brück (Zöckler, *Geschichte der Beziehungen*, p. 585).

¹¹⁹ Cantata *Wer Dank opfert* (BWV 17/3, mm. 1–14 et seq.).

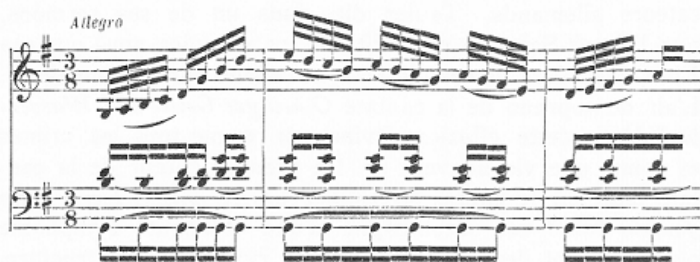
¹²⁰ Cantata *Gott, wie dein name, so ist auch dein Ruhm* (BWV 171/2, mm. 1–18 et seq.).

¹²¹ BWV 96/1, mm. 20–38 et seq.

¹²² BWV 1/1, mm. 1–5 et seq.

When Bach represents the movement of water he also devotes himself to vitalizing the images familiar to German preachers. Tauler says, in one of his sermons, that the Holy Spirit spreads itself over the disciples just as “the Rhine, overflowing its dikes,” floods the countryside.¹²³ The soprano aria in the cantata *O heiliges Geist- und Wasserband* describes this divine outpouring that “drowns all iniquity . . . and bestows new life upon us.”¹²⁴ The first chorus from the cantata written on Luther’s chorale *Christ, unser Herr zum Jordan kam* (Christ our Lord came to the Jordan)¹²⁵ has an astonishing orchestral accompaniment that combines themes of differing rhythms and constructions. Bach has known how to unravel the distinct voices and rhythms in the great din of waters: he reproduces them and mingles them to depict this marvelous baptismal stream that, like the current of the prophetic river, “washes away our sins” and drowns “even bitter death.”¹²⁶ We must also note the solo viola part in the aria from the cantata *Wo soll ich fliehen hin*. While the tenor begs the Lord to let the source of blood flow profusely “that washes itself clean of the sinful stains,” the viola plays a sequence of even notes that pour out continually or that well forth in fluid harmonies.¹²⁷

In several other cantatas Bach imitates the monotonous lapping of waves, and I have already cited a recitative passage containing this type of motif in the cantata *Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne trage*.¹²⁸ At the beginning of the cantata *Siehe, ich will viel Fischer aussenden* the even waverings in the accompaniment make one think of the eddies in Lake Nazareth.¹²⁹ The “sea of tears” is agitated more turbulently in the middle of the first tenor aria from the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*,¹³⁰ and, in the tenor aria from the cantata *Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen?*, “the foaming waves of Belial’s waters” are unleashed with fury (ex. 12.2).



Ex. 12.2. *Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen?*, BWV 81/3, mm. 1–3.

¹²³ Nebe, *Zur Geschichte der Predigt*, 363.

¹²⁴ BWV 165/1, mm. 1–13 et seq.

¹²⁵ BWV 7/1, mm. 1–16 et seq.

¹²⁶ See the excellent analysis by Albert Schweitzer: *J. S. Bach, le Musicien-Poète* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1905), 323.

¹²⁷ BWV 5/3, mm. 16–44.

¹²⁸ BWV 56/2, mm. 1–7 et seq.

¹²⁹ BWV 88/1, mm. 1–10 et seq.

¹³⁰ BWV 21/5, mm. 1–6 et seq.

The bass aria from the same cantata is sung amidst the tumult of a raging storm: the strings and basso continuo play a violent motif that suddenly appears from the depths of the orchestra and rises up like “towering waves.”¹³¹

At the beginning of the *Dramma per Musica: Schleicht, spielende Wellen* (Flow, playful waves), Bach describes the waves’ gentle rippling. Before Beethoven, he shows us the calm surface of flowing water pleated with light ripples (ex. 12.3).

Ex. 12.3. *Schleicht, spielende Wellen*, BWV 206/1, mm. 1–6.

In the “Elbe” aria from the same cantata, broad violin motifs spread like eddies,¹³² and the “Danube” aria is accompanied with fluid passages in the oboes d’amore and basso continuo.¹³³

Not only are nature’s sights and sounds shown in Bach’s works, but we also discover pages in them where the master is not content to present us with the sonorous form of things, so he brings to life the interplay of natural phenomena. He goes deeper, and he awakens in us these slightly troubling landscapes whose tinted mists serve as scenery for certain of our memories and create the atmosphere for our emotions. The primitive picturesqueness of sonorous imitations and descriptive sketches are not enough for him to evoke such complex and touching images: he must create them from a richer art with more secret and penetrating facets. And it especially needs to move along with continuity so that the entire work is saturated with the same kind of impressions that will hold the listener in a sort of contemplative dream. The role of the orchestra is decisive in such scenes, and the overall spell arises from its indefinite and nuanced speech that seduces us from the first moment and gradually fascinates us by its iridescent sameness. If we examine the arias in which Spitta quite correctly traces some of these interpretations of

¹³¹ BWV 81/5, mm. 1–12 et seq.

¹³² BWV 206/5, mm. 1–15 et seq.

¹³³ BWV 206/5, mm. 1–14 et seq.

nature, we observe that the most striking elements are provided by the orchestra. Therefore, in the tenor aria from the cantata for Pentacost, *Erschallet ihr Lieder*,¹³⁴ in which “the May breeze blows,”¹³⁵ the unison first and second violins and violas unfurl even scales that gently rise and fall—as if propelled by great, alternating breaths. In the first chorus of the cantata for Pentecostal Monday *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt*, the instrumental episode that ends the soprano aria and the bass aria accompanied by the oboe give us impressions of summer: we might say that this work unfolds itself in a landscape of meadows and flowers upon which descend, at twilight, the shadow of the echo-filled woods. Spitta says that the tenor aria from the Easter cantata *Der Himmel lacht*¹³⁶ has the character of a “spring song,”¹³⁷ and it is also through the orchestra that Bach expresses this hazy poetry of April weather. He sings of “man’s renewal”: the accompaniment, with a dense sonority full of unsettled rustlings and murmurs, makes us think of the breeze blowing harmoniously through the leaves in the trees.¹³⁸ Whereas Salomon Franck speaks to us in the text of the soul’s rebirth, Johann Sebastian presents us with its symbol by heralding the forests’ return to life.

The sinfonia that precedes the second part of the *Christmas Oratorio*¹³⁹ is a wonderful scene of Christmas Eve in the German countryside. We do not need to look there—as does Spitta—for the charm of the “oriental idylle,” but we can recognize, as he does, a scene of clear northern lights. The crystalline effect produced by the combination of violins and transverse flutes suggests visions of winter, and we can picture the fields covered with snow that crunches under foot and the twinkling starlight while the persistence of the rocking rhythm simultaneously recalls the harmonious pilgrimage of the planets across the night skies and the ceaseless flight of angels—the Christ child’s mysterious messengers.

To this celestial concert the shepherd’s music responds with chords in the oboes—as Bach follows the custom of using these instruments for pastoral depictions. In the first chorus of the cantata *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*¹⁴⁰ the oboes, along with the horns, awake in us feelings of life in the fields, and it is the same in the cantata *Der Herr ist mein getreuer Hirt*.¹⁴¹ The two flutes that accompany the soprano aria in the secular *Hunt Cantata: Was mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd* (What pleases me is only the merry hunt)¹⁴² remind us of bells tinkling in pastures.

¹³⁴ BWV 172/4, mm. 1–20 et seq.

¹³⁵ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:391.

¹³⁶ BWV 31/6, mm. 1–10 et seq.

¹³⁷ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:535–36.

¹³⁸ The orchestra is comprised of two violins, two violas, two cellos, and continuo.

¹³⁹ BWV 248/10, mm. 1–13 et seq.

¹⁴⁰ BWV 1/1.

¹⁴¹ BWV 112/1.

¹⁴² BWV 208/9, mm. 9–21 et seq.

Moreover, the character of the seasons is just as wonderfully shown in the secular cantatas as in the sacred ones. The first soprano aria from the cantata *Weichet nur betrübte Schatten*¹⁴³ is completely infused with spring's poetry, and in the *Dramma per Musica: Der zufriedengestellte Äolus*—written in honor of A. F. Müller (1725)—the orchestra fortells the coming of equinoctial winds and autumn's melancholy falling of leaves.¹⁴⁴

Through such evocations Bach clearly informs us that he has understood the language of natural events and that he has charged himself with conveying it. He goes even further: no one better than he knows how to extract from nature's spectacles the hues of our soul. Far from refusing all communication with the sentient world, he consents to show us his own "mists" by taking their image from outside himself, and he surrounds the paintings he creates for us from his emotions with moving landscapes. In this he is profoundly German. Spitta notes that "it is a Germanic character trait to recognize in extra-human nature a type of personality associated with human joy and sadness."¹⁴⁵ We can cite numerous pages in which Bach seems to intend to place nature's intelligence within man. With a strange subtlety, he depicts the troubled hours when phantoms haunt our imagination in the twilight of our conscious activity. Out of the evening mists he causes a multitude of nondescript forms to arise that float around us like messengers of wonders and mysteries. In the first chorus of the cantata *Bleib bei uns*¹⁴⁶ the elusive and obstinate murmuring of the strings darkens this work in which Bach foreshadows the anguish of the worried pilgrims in Emmaus who are troubled at the day's end. And at the beginning of the cantata *Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbaths*¹⁴⁷ the master describes in a similar way the fright of the disciples at nightfall's approach, and he uses the same procedure again in the recitative of the cantata *Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange*, where the soprano laments that "God's sweet look of grace hath hidden itself beneath night and clouds."¹⁴⁸ Toward the end of the *St. Matthew Passion* the bass addresses a wonderful invocation to "the evening hour . . . when the union with god has been concluded,"¹⁴⁹ and Bach lets some motifs that exhale murmuringly float above the prolonged whole notes in the continuo like sheets of mist rising from the bottom of a valley "in the cool evening hour." A whole procession of representations and sensations invited by the words are unfurled in this way. At the moment of showing us Christ having reached the end of his task and man reborn, Johann Sebastian has thought of the hour when work in the fields comes to an end and the dew revives the crops. To crown his sacred poem he takes

¹⁴³ BWV 202/1, mm. 1–10 et seq.

¹⁴⁴ BWV 205/1, mm. 1–16 et seq.

¹⁴⁵ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:390.

¹⁴⁶ BWV 6/1, mm. 1–16 et seq.

¹⁴⁷ BWV 42/1, mm. 8–15 et seq.

¹⁴⁸ BWV 155/1, mm. 1–5 et seq.

¹⁴⁹ BWV 244/74, mm. 1–8 et seq.

its last images from the “earth’s bible,” in which he finds signs of God as well as reflections of his own affections.

This tendency to discover a kind of fellow feeling between aspects of nature and states of our soul appears often in Bach’s works. When he speaks of the “vale of tears” in the tenor aria from the cantata *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*¹⁵⁰ he suggests the image of an arid land where a plaintive wind blows. In the soprano aria from the cantata *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen* the flute and oboes d’amore evoke a landscape of sad contours, void of vegetation or life, where sounds carry far, are prolonged in floating vibrations, and go on until they die out in the forsaken atmosphere (ex. 12.4).



Ex. 12.4. *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen*, BWV 146/5, mm. 1–4.

For Spitta the first chorus from the cantata *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben?* presents a “musical tableau in which the sounds of bells are mingled with the scents of flowers,” and this movement recalls to the Bach historian the impressions that one might feel in a cemetery at springtime.¹⁵¹ It seems that in this work—destined for the Sunday when the gospel about the young man from Nain is read in the service—the composer wanted to describe a funeral scene, but he has not made it gloomy. An old German painting¹⁵² in the Lübeck museum shows us a burial procession that moves along through a green and flowery countryside, but surrounding the black drapings, we see only symbols of life. It is with this same feeling that Bach has composed this cantata, in which he is inspired, perhaps, by a

¹⁵⁰ BWV 114/2, mm. 1–17 et seq.

¹⁵¹ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:264.

¹⁵² A reproduction of this painting is found in Goldschmidt’s work *Lübecker Malerei und Plastik bis 1530* (1889).

sentence that he has used elsewhere: “The cool grave will cover me with roses.”¹⁵³ We might say that he is very ready to carry his devotional thoughts into pantheistic reveries. He believes in the resurrection of Christ, but his Germanic instinct suggests to him a vague doctrine of a return to the elements: the idea of nature and God are somewhat mingled in his mind—as if he were harboring a vague memory of Jakob Böhme’s words “Creation is nothing other than a manifestation of the infinite God who exists in everything.”

* * *

Love

In Eugen d’Albert’s preface to his edition of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, d’Albert peremptorily declares that Bach did not take cognizance of the innumerable nuances of passion, sadness, and love, and that he did not even suspect that music could express them.¹⁵⁴ But through all the foregoing in this book, I have sought to show that Bach was an emotional composer of the highest order, and we will now see that the master has not rejected representations of love in his work. As a matter of fact, we do not find this level of emotion in a number of composers who have complacently interpreted the ardent poems in the *Song of Songs* in a conventional way. Friar Lodovico Zacconi practically reproached Palestrina for having interpreted its texts. Zacconi wrote that if he had been able to give Palestrina his opinion he would have advised him to renounce writing on such words because singers were only satisfied with performing pieces like *Quam pulchra est amica mea* (How beautiful it is, my love) and others similarly tinted with a sensual coloring—and God only knows what their thoughts and intentions were when they sang them.¹⁵⁵ It would therefore have been even more justifiable to reprimand Heinrich Schütz for having chosen some very sensual prayers from this book of love.¹⁵⁶ Although Bach sometimes wrote some paraphrases of these exalted pages, he only dealt with them on the occasions when they were offered by his librettist. Otherwise, he steers completely clear of every direct sensual image. He uses other means to deliver to us the secrets of his impassioned heart: in certain passages from his sacred cantatas he tells us of these passions with absolute sincerity. But when we want to consider his confidences we must not base our assessment on insufficient evidence. For Spitta the duo between bass and soprano in the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*¹⁵⁷ gives “the impression of a charming

¹⁵³ In the cantata *Komm, du süsse Todesstunde* (BWV 161/4, mm. 15–17).

¹⁵⁴ *Das wohltempierte Clavier*, part 1 (Stuttgart and Berlin: J. G. Gotta, 1906).

¹⁵⁵ See the previously cited article by Friedrich Chrysander: *G. F. Händel* (Leipzig: 1858).

¹⁵⁶ Schütz, *Symphoniae sacrae*, ed. Spitta, *Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1885–1927), vol. 5, pt. 1.

¹⁵⁷ BWV 21/8.

love duet.”¹⁵⁸ I agree, but I add that the profundity of Bach’s soul is not revealed there. The text presents us with an affected dialogue whose characters are God and the faithful soul, and far from concealing the scene’s flaws, Bach shows them naïvely. We would say that he does not suspect that the galant affectation of these words—ridiculous in the theatre—is intolerable in the church. He does not even envelop the silliness of the conversation within the folds of the orchestra: childish and insipid, the dialogue is pursued between the two characters without anything being enhanced or transformed. With ingenuity, he emphasizes some phrases with an affected tenderness that the plays of counterpoint continuously restate. Some composers who lived too aloof from the words had such misunderstandings and wrote their religious works in the operatic “barnyard” style. But it is unlikely in this instance that Johann Sebastian sins out of ignorance—as far away from the stage as he may keep, he at least knows the style of its repertoire. If he treats the subject that the poet offers him like a pastoral opera fragment, it is because these lines bring to mind for him some operatic dialogues. He errs both from an excess of memory and an excess of honesty: he obeys the stylistic conventions that the librettist adopted. As a conscientious interpreter, he does his utmost to attune his music to the theme put forward. But he does not have it in him to find any vocal figures to fit these pretty tricks, and he did not lack models for such a theme as “You hate me! I love you!—Oh, not at all! Yes! Surely!” This banter of criss-crossing rejoinders appears quite frequently in the Hamburg operas.¹⁵⁹

Some other cantatas contain love dialogues of the same size and thrust, but Bach knows better how to disentangle himself from the flowery traps that the poet has set for him. Beneath the flirtatiousness of alternating talk, he discovers a sincere and powerful feeling of his own, and the faults of the libretto are erased when his music—taking on the poem’s pace—brings directly to us the echo of this profound German tenderness that a “fashionable” jargon has disguised. So, through the language of notes he reveals to us the essence of the emotion that the words have belittled and distorted. He no longer confines himself to what the actors say, but he expresses what must be said. He goes beyond their banter to the soul, and he substitutes an inner and true emotional scene for the theatrical mannerisms. In an oracular phrase, Hildegard, the abbess of Saint Ruprecht, predicted, around 1150, the effect of such a music: “Sic et verbum corpus designat, symphonia autem spiritum manifestat” (Thus, even as words delineate the body, musical performance reveals the spirit).¹⁶⁰ We again find something of this “vision” in Arthur Schopenhauer’s frequently cited thought “Die Musik ist das Abbild des Willens

¹⁵⁸ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:532.

¹⁵⁹ For example, see *Sueno* by Feind, act 1, sc. 3. The text of this opera, performed in 1706, is published in Barthold Feind’s *Deutsche Gedichte* (1708). Also read the 12th scene of *Bellerophon* in *Die allerneueste Art, zur reinen und galanten Poesie zu gelangen* by Hunold (Menantes), etc.

¹⁶⁰ Hildegard von Bingen, *Scivias* 1151 or 1152), I. III; *visio* 13 (vol. 197 from Migne’s *Patrologie*, col. 735).

selbst” (Music is a reflection of the will itself).¹⁶¹ In the duets from the cantata *Wachet auf*, the master confirms the aptness of these aphorisms that have inspired German reverie and philosophy in such different cultural eras. The second duet from this cantata portrays Jesus as the “bridegroom” who responds to the words of love from the chosen virgin: (Soul) “My friend is mine.”—(Christ) “And I am his.”—(Together) “Nothing shall sever this love.”

The bright and endearing motifs pass from one voice to the other—begun by the soprano and completed by the bass. The oboe, which states and repeats these motifs, creates a gentle light that shines over the whole scene. But notice at the beginning the skillful simplicity that Bach uses to describe so elegantly the smiling beauty of the characters and to tell us of the harmony of their souls. Attuned, their parts soon join together after completing their individual statements. If, on one hand, these melodies only arrive at their perfection—thanks to the combining of feelings of the two interlocutors—and develop like a musical interpretation of Leibniz’s phrase “To love is to be carried away with pleasure in the perfection . . . of the loved object,”¹⁶² then, on the other hand, in the fusion of themes, we make out a symbolic interpretation of this proposition by Johann Arndt (1555–1621), whose book, *Wahren Christentum*, Bach possessed: “The first property of love is to unite the lover with the loved object and to change it into himself”¹⁶³ (ex. 12.5).

Mein Freund ist mein!
My friend is mine!

Die Liebe soll nichts
This love shall nothing
(Nothing shall sever)

Und ich bin dein!
And I am his!

Die Liebe soll nichts
This love shall nothing
(Nothing shall sever)

¹⁶¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, ed. Grisebach (Leipzig: 1892), vol. 3, § 52.

¹⁶² Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Nouveaux Essais sur l'entendement humain* (1704), 2: 20.

¹⁶³ Arndt, *Wahres Christentum* (1610), *De vero Christianismo*, Book 4 (Leipzig: 1704), pt. 2, chap. 28.



Ex. 12.5. *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140/6, mm. 8–12.

The duet in the cantata *Nur Jedem das Seine* contains a passage in which the voices join each other as in the preceding example, and the music translates this abandoning of personality that Salomon Franck exclaims in the line “Take me from myself and give me to thee!” (ex. 12.6).

Nimm mich mir, und gib mich
Take me from myself, and give me

Nimm mich mir, und gib mich dir, nimm mich
Take me from myself, and give me to thee, take me

mir, und gib mich dir!
from myself, and give me to thee!

mir, und gib mich dir!
from myself, and give me to thee!

Ex. 12.6. *Nur Jedem das Seine*, BWV 163/5, mm. 1–6.

In this work (1715), written well before the cantata *Wachet auf* (1731), Bach already gives evidence of penetrating the mystery of wedded wills. A little later, this mystery must have been fully revealed to him through a miracle of loving patience. In Goethe’s novel *Wahlverwandtschaften*, when Edouard finds that, little by little, Ottilie’s writing is altering to appear just like his own, he exclaims “You love me, Ottilie, etc.”¹⁶⁴ Anna Magdalena Wülken, Bach’s second wife, gave the

¹⁶⁴ Chap. 12 of Goethe’s novel.

same proof of her love through certain of her copies of the master's works that could almost pass for his original manuscripts: the score of the cantata *O heiliges Geist und Wasserbad*¹⁶⁵ had at first been believed by Spitta to be in the cantor's own handwriting.¹⁶⁶

Whereas devotional books proposed love's theory to him, Bach actually came to know, through experience, the power of the feeling that, by drawing two individuals toward each other, reshapes them into each other's image and surpasses their differences. It is fitting, moreover, that human love enlivens these duets in which the faithful soul and God exchange oaths and promises, but it is a human love of a more general and more intense kind. None of the tenderness of Corisande's and Florestan's calls goes as far in Jean-Baptiste Lully's *Amadis de Gaule* (1684). Lully tells us of their yearnings, but they maintain their distinct identities. Each of them gently sighs the beloved's name,¹⁶⁷ but when Bach has the chosen virgin converse with the mystical bridegroom, the religious composer attains, through religious sincerity, the highest degree of passionate expression. From their mingled and enslaved voices on the same motifs, these singers foreshadow for us the pages where Tristan and Isolde fuel their delirium: "I am no longer Tristan," says Tristan, and Isolde sings "I am no longer Isolde. I am Tristan, and you are Isolde."¹⁶⁸

Whereas Bach brings two like motifs together and binds them with consonant harmonies to signify that the union of hearts has been accomplished, he also uses an opposite device to portray the stirrings of a love that is still searching and that reaches out toward its object. Quite often, words that translate the idea of desire are accompanied by themes formed from notes belonging to the dissonant configuration that calls most imperiously for a resolution—that is to say, a return to the tonic harmony.¹⁶⁹

We find a marvelous instance of these melodic figures in the first duet from the cantata *Wachet auf*: the solo violin articulates them with a disturbing intensity. The bridegroom's and the wise virgin's voices barely do anything but realize the dialogue implied in the gospel of the "ten virgins": (Soul) "When comest thou, my salvation?"—(Christ) "I am coming; come, lovely soul." But beneath the simple conversation Bach depicts some profound images through a type of intuition particular to the German spirit.¹⁷⁰ In this flickering and ever-enduring flame burning in the Scripture's lamp, he sees an image of desire whose bitter and cherished fire is fueled by the soul, without which it would no longer seem alive to him. While the singers are respectfully sharing the Gospel text, an impetuous accompaniment envelops their reserved daring. At first the violin speaks like them,

¹⁶⁵ BWV 165.

¹⁶⁶ Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:809. This error is rectified in 2:789.

¹⁶⁷ Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Amadis de Gaule* (1684), Act 1, sc. 2.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1883), act 2.

¹⁶⁹ For example, diminished seventh arpeggios.

¹⁷⁰ BWV 140, mm. 1–12 et seq.

then it says passionately what their modest and flowery language awkwardly avows. The characters prolong a discrete conversation that is reserved and slightly struggling, akin to the wooers silently in love celebrated by Neumeister,¹⁷¹ and they only sustain the dialogue by repeating themselves, hampered in their discourse by the very excess of feeling. The violin's desperate and swirling cantilena is infused with all that they hold in their hearts, either because they do not know how to say it or because they are afraid to desecrate it by proclaiming it. The violin throbs with their fever, multiplying the sighs of the avid languor that their chaste reserve hides from us, and, although it is intended to tell of the raptures of a very pure love, it is not free from this vague sadness that possesses the lovers' hearts and that 17th-century writers so readily recall—whether they consider it, like Bossuet, to be inseparable from secular love,¹⁷² or whether they judge it, like Bussy-Rabutin, to be inevitably associated with the anxiety of loving.¹⁷³

This melancholy serves as the basis for the endearing aria that Phoebus Apollo sings for the “beautiful Hyacinth” in the *Dramma per Musica: Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan*. Note that this aria is in B minor—a tonality in which Bach composed several of his most beautiful works and, moreover, was considered then to be “bizarre, morose, and melancholy.” The key contains something veiled that perfectly suits this aria that has a discrete and penetrating tenderness.

In a cantata where he warmly expresses the poem of desire *Ich geh' und suche mit Verlangen*, Johann Sebastian also uses a characteristic tonality—the key of E major—that Mattheson declares “the most appropriate for the subjects of exalted and desperate love.”

Through this choice of particular tonalities, Bach again seems to us in brotherhood with his countrymen in thought and use,¹⁷⁴ and one last example shows us the same bond with the inventive and reflective forms dear to his country's artists. We know that the early German painters liked to mingle representations of love with images of death. But instead of the horrible, gaunt head making grimaces next to the beloved—like the masters of the Middle Ages rendered so menacingly opposite blossoming youth—Bach dares to defy death by knowing how to comfort himself with love right up to the final hour: “Oh! How happy would my end be, if your dear hands closed my eyes, these eyes that were faithful to you!” Through the interpretation he gives these words, Bach shows a noble sentimentality whose restrained emphasis already has the penetrating simplicity that gives so much power to certain 19th-century lieder. However, he

¹⁷¹ *Wohl dem, welcher seine Brust | Mit Verschwiegenheit verschliesset*, etc. in Christian Friedrich Hunold's *Die allerneueste Art* (Hamburg: 1712), 210.

¹⁷² “Secular love is always plaintive; he always says that it languishes and dies” in Jacques Bénigne Bossuet's “Sermon for the Assumption” (1663), *Oeuvres complètes* (1862 ed.), 2:803.

¹⁷³ Cited in part 2 of Niedt's *Musicalische Handleitung*, 1721 ed., p. 99.

¹⁷⁴ See Johann Mattheson's *Das neu eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg: 1713), pt. 3, chap. 2. Moreover, Mattheson cites Kircher.

clings to the past through the idea: not far from this death-comforting love song, we find unique proofs of Christian tenderness—in a song in which our life is compared to the most ephemeral vapor,¹⁷⁵ in an aria that brings to mind the grave and death knell, and, ultimately, in an incomparable hymn of the serene struggle with death: “Fall asleep, ye weary eyes.” [“Schlumert ein, ihr matten Augen,” *Ich habe genug*, BWV 82/3.—Trans.] Only a German whose heart is filled with a fervent religion that preaches the “Sehnsucht” (longing) for an unknown life could offer such gifts to his beloved wife.

* * *

The Comedic

Through his comic works, Bach completes the revelation to us of his German spirit.

J. M. Schmidt cites some of these works that became popular in Leipzig around 1749.¹⁷⁶ This vogue already shows us that the master’s comic verve is indeed essentially German, for laughter has something national about it, and each country preserves its forms of humor that are maintained through its language, its customs, and its fashions. As soon as we attempt to cheer ourselves up, we all reveal our origin, our culture, and our tastes, and those who laugh with us reveal these traits as well. When Schmidt recognizes the communicative virtue of Bach’s joyous humor, he points out the same tendency: Johann Sebastian has amused himself like a German. This serious man, who knows so well how to laugh, had only to take several of his family’s elders as his models. His great-grandfather, Hans Bach (c. 1580–1626), was known throughout the province for being an incomparable inventor of funny stories. There are two engraved portraits of this mischievous country fiddler: in one we see him dressed up outlandishly and playing the violin, and we read in the caption accompanying this comical image “If you hear him, you will have to laugh.” A jester’s cap is drawn in an armorial fashion under this inscription,¹⁷⁷ and we also find a head crowned with the same jester’s cap in the watermark on the paper upon which the *Lamento* by Heinrich Bach (1615–92) is reproduced—a copy that undoubtedly comes from the Bach family.¹⁷⁸ Philipp Emmanuel Bach, in his notes accompanying his family genealogy, also points out the “joyful humor” of Heinrich, the son of Hans “with

¹⁷⁵ *Bach Gesellschaft*, vol. 43², no. 37. The text of the song of “the pipe” is imitated from an ode by Lombard, pastor at Middelburg, translated by Canitz in *Gedichte*, ed. by J. U. König (1734), 300.

¹⁷⁶ Johann Michael Schmidt, *Musico-Theologia* (Bayreuth: 1754).

¹⁷⁷ For all these historical details, see Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, vol. 1.

¹⁷⁸ Remember here that a very old English paper watermark is the “fool’s cap.”

the fine beard.” We also know through Philipp Emmanuel that the representatives of this line of Bach musicians loved to get together on an appointed day and, after having sanctified their gathering with a chorale, loved to sing popular songs spiced with slightly crude jokes. Moreover, they imbued their amusement with a certain craft by ably combining motifs from various songs according to the procedues used by arrangers of quodlibets.¹⁷⁹

Johann Sebastian remembered these ingenious “mock serenades” when he wrote the last of thirty variations intended for Johann Theophilus Goldberg. In it he skillfully combines some fragments of two melodies then in vogue. Spitta gives the texts of these songs, and the second has still not been erased from people’s memory. It is appropriate to note here that this song’s first two measures contain the “Bergamasca” theme (rustic dance from Bergamo), frequently treated by 17th-century composers. In particular, we find it in Frescobaldi (1583–1644), G. B. Fasolo (born around 1600), S. A. Scherer, and B. Pasquini¹⁸⁰ (exs. 12.7a–d).



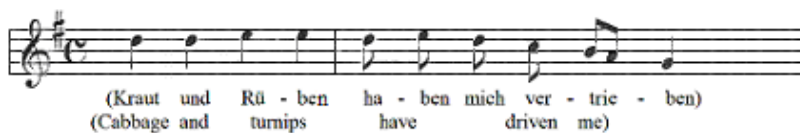
Ex. 12.7a. G. Frescobaldi, *Fiori musicali: Bergamasca*, mm. 2–3.



Ex. 12.7b. G. B. Fasolo, *Bergamasca*, mm. 1–3.



Ex. 12.7c. S. A. Scherer, *Archives des Maîtres de l'Orgue*, VIII/1/34, mm. 1–3.



Ex. 12.7d. “Goldberg Variations,” No. 30, BWV 988, mm. 2–3.

¹⁷⁹ On this musical form, we can consult Elsa Bienenfeld’s article (*Sammelbände der I. M. G.*, vol. 6, p. 80).

¹⁸⁰ See Max Seiffert’s *Geschichte der Klaviermusik* (Leipzig: 1899), 274.

Through this allusion to the “Bergamasca,” Bach evokes yet another ballad. So it is not out of the question that he had chosen this motif with a multiple meaning to augment the comedy in his “Quodlibet.” Friedrich Erhardt Niedt informs us on the meaning of the “bergamasque” in the satirical novelette introducing the first part of his *Musicalische Handleitung* in which the character Tacitus recounts his apprenticeship with the cruel teacher Orbilius. After having studied the mysteries of musical notation for two years and after applying himself to recognizing the “crows’s feet” that designate the values and lengths of notes, Tacitus finally managed to play his first piece, which had the imposing title of *Bergamasco*—a piece in which, the narrator remarks, is found some secret virtue, since so many organists are fanatical about making their pupils start out on it. “The melody is, after all, that of a peasant tune that mischievous children sing in the streets: *Ripen Garsten wille wi meyen* (We will mow ripe barley).”¹⁸¹ By crowning part four of his *Clavier-Uebung* with a variation in which the memory of this famous and—as Kuhnau called it¹⁸²—“ancient” piece, Bach would therefore have wanted to recall what would have been the earliest memory of so many musicians, and, for all we know, perhaps his own from when he worked under the strict discipline of his brother Johann Christoph in Ohrdruf.

Bach does not stop there in the use of common melodies. In his comic *Peasant Cantata* (*Mer hahn en neue Oberkeet*), he uses the tune from *La Folia*. This theme had a wonderful history: Kuhnau cites it in the first pages of his *Charlatan musical* (1700), and Johann Mattheson speaks again, in his *Parfait maître de chapelle* (1739), of this old melody that, he says, “resembles the sarabande.” Note also that Reinhard Keiser does not hesitate to use this lowly motif in the overture to his comic opera *Jodelet* (1726). Bach adorns it with a melancholy grace that both ennobles and renews it (ex. 12.8):



Ex. 12.8. *Mer hahn en neue Oberkeet*, BWV 212/9, mm. 1–8.

Yet another theme in this “rustic cantata” has a foreign origin: the fanfare sounded by the horn in the bass aria “Es nehme zehntausend Ducaten” (He takes ten thousand ducats) comes from a collection gathered by de Dampierre, “nobleman in service to the king.” However, in 1742 this hunting call was rather widely known in Germany as being a peasant’s tune, and in the recitative that precedes it, this aria is heralded as being well suited to the rural lifestyle. The soprano starts singing the welcome to the new lord of the Klein-Schocher manor in

¹⁸¹ Niedt, *Musicalische Handleitung*, § 10.

¹⁸² Johann Kuhnau, *Das alt-väterische Bergamasco in Musicus curiosus oder Battalus* (Freiburg: 1691), 73.

a delicate way with an affected elegance and coquettishness, but the bass declares that such finenesses are better for the town: “The rest of us peasants do not sing so softly. Just listen to this little ditty of mine.”

Alongside these melodies adopted by the German people, some others of unquestionable German origin appear in this work. We do not know the source from which Bach took the “old air” that the soprano presents to the audience, but its “alte Weise” (old style) has the cast of certain German songs that have been preserved for us. For example, compare it with this one in Andreas Gryphius’s play *Peter Squentz* (1658) that is chanted by master Lollinger—weaver and “mastersinger”—who plays the role of “la fontaine” (the fountain) (ex. 12.9):

Tenor

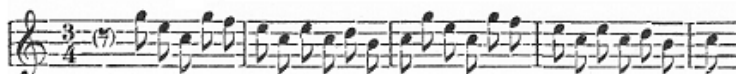
Ich bin der le-ben-di-ge Brun - - - - - nen purr -
I am the living fountain - - - - - purr -

purr - - - - -
purr - - - - -

Ex. 12.9. Andreas Gryphius’s play, *Peter Squentz*, Act III, mm. 1–6.

The ponderous rhythm, the hammered delivery, and the melodic repeats are common to both the *Peasant Cantata* and *Peter Squentz*. They manifest the endless repetitiveness in the lives of the oppressed northern common folk who endure a monotonous and tiring labor that often leaves an after-taste of fatigue in their gaiety and deprives them of the inexhaustible variety of exuberant fantasy that only southerners know. We often find in these northerners a sort of obstinacy in attempting to “make onself gay.” But, as the pace of these works is prolonged and the phlegmatic bodies begin to rouse, a frenzy of movement follows their usual dullness as the rough cadence pushes and carries them along. All weariness disappears, and the song, beginning in a drowsy key in the middle register, builds up into great shouting, with the beat being pounded out on tables and floor in a wild harmony of clashing pitches and clinking beer steins. An impassioned call for dancing thus arises from this haphazard music, and the “Bierfiedler” (beer fiddler) has only to strike some chords on his violin for everyone to start whirling. Moreover, this tavern “maestro” appears first: Bach has not forgotten to evoke this essential character—the fiddler—in his comic village scenes of rural festivities. He is the player who begins this cantata, assisted by his “socius” (partner) and his apprentices, and their orchestra of two violins and a bass starts to scrape out a folk style “suite” that hardly includes any noble dances that would require the steps of “high lords” but, rather, dances that gradually loosen up the “merriments”

("lustig")¹⁸³ of the fair varied by stimulating rhythms, varied capers, carpathic leaps, and wry faces. The sinfonia also includes a "volte" (jumping and whirling dance in 6/8), and we know that the moralists condemned this spinning foolishness and forbade it to girls who wanted to preserve a good name. Further on, we see several measures in the style of the English country dance that have nearly the same motif—although with a different rhythm—that we find in a collection of pieces destined by Daniel Speer for his *Kunst-Pfeiffer* (Town piper) (1695). Stated in A minor, Speer's motif is taken up again in C major after the first four measures. Here is the second period¹⁸⁴ (ex. 12.10):



Ex. 12.10. Daniel Speer, *Kunst-Pfeiffer*, No. 3 (violin), mm. 5–9.

If the solemn sarabande is mixed with this boistrous hodgepodge, at least it is woefully caricatured—like a drunkard's self-centered plain-chant style moaning—while being intoned in octaves by the instruments. Before letting us hear the singers' high-saxon dialect, Bach first creates a jibberish in this music by reducing it to peasants' grammar. Around 1696, Wolfgang Caspar Printz wrote "Go on then and see if you can meet, in the entire Roman Empire, a boor displeased by our music if the tenor, discant, and bass sing in parallel octaves." And he adds, "Even in France, we often find a dozen well-established musicians who scrape out their ballets together in unison."¹⁸⁵ The humor of this passage comes then both from what is stylistically incorrect¹⁸⁶ and from what comprises a double mockery addressed to uncouth louts of crude discernment and to fiddlers who humor the ignorant crowd. Just as Bach preserves in his motifs the comical character of the melodies known to amuse the public, he also revives and applies the satirical spirit of the writers who make fun of unenlightened artists and listeners. He simultaneously makes use both of music that causes us to laugh and music we laugh about. Here, in the *Peasant Cantata*, the seriousness of the dance style that he uses renders the illusions hidden within it even more comical. Moreover, he had a composition by J. J. Schmelzer (around 1660) for a model. Schmelzer's piece—which has many similarities to Bach's introduction to this cantata—in fact ends with a phrase played in octaves by the two violins and the bass. But the Viennese

¹⁸³ A collection of manuscripts in the Conservatory library includes a piece entitled *Loustique* "for crossed hands," along with some pieces by Couperin, and Marchand's *Vénitienne*.

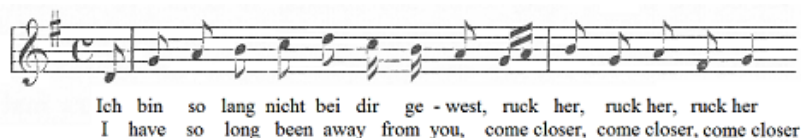
¹⁸⁴ Speer, *REcens FABricitus LABor, oder neugebachene Taffel-Schnitz* (1685). The author published this work under the pseudonym of Asne de Rilpe.

¹⁸⁵ Printz, *Phrynis Mytilenaeus*, (Leipzig: 1696), 20.

¹⁸⁶ In his *Amfiparnasso* (1597), O. Vecchi uses parallel fifths with the intention of being humorous.

master ends his amusing sketch of “Polish bagpipes” by giving a church hymn to these instruments that have imitated the buzzing, nasal dialogue and the outrageous cadences of the quivering and unruly bagpipes: the beggars who are this piece’s virtuoso vagabonds conclude with a parody on the *Te Deum*.¹⁸⁷ Bach, the cantor, would never stoop to debasing a chorale stanza in this way by combining it with some tavern ditties:¹⁸⁸ in his comic cantata medley, where so many musical reminiscences evoke the memory of ribald words, he never includes sacred songs that would be degraded by any resemblances to Neusiedler’s *Gassenhauer*.¹⁸⁹

Bach respects those who follow God’s creed too much to draw upon the liturgy for foolish characters, and we see that the folk idiom furnishes him with enough silly subjects that he has no need to distort sacred ones in order to create more laughter. Allusions to accepted licentious jokes burst out everywhere. In the first recitative, everyday themes occurring in the orchestra part suit the words of the young man and the hussy. When Bach has them sing “Ah, our master does not grumble: he knows as well as we do, and even better, how good it is to joke a little,” the violins play a motif that seems to draw upon the ditty already used for the “Quodlibet” in the thirty Goldberg variations (ex. 12.11):



Ex. 12.11. Goldberg Variations, No. 30, BWV 988, mm. 1–2.

And, as soon as there is no doubt that the girl has bestowed the single kiss that the suitor requests and that surely will not satisfy him, we hear a short ritornello

¹⁸⁷ Manuscript collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale (vol. 7, 1099). In 1905, I had this piece performed at the *École des Hautes Études sociales*.

¹⁸⁸ The reverent Heinrich Bach, accused of having allowed the Lord’s Payer to be made fun of, defended himself strenuously against this slander (Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 1:32). Note here that a 16th-century *Quodlibet* cited by Hilgenfeldt in *J. S. Bachs Leben, Werken und Werke* (1850) combines several chorales, and that the *Lord’s Prayer* is included in them. Would H. Bach have had this composition performed, and would this be the origin of the complaint against him?

¹⁸⁹ However, he recalls for us in this cantata, through an allusion, the prayers of the Christian congregation. When the “Dirne” (harlot) and the fellow say: “The pastor always likes to make penance,” the instruments imitate his praying, as in the examples cited above (pp. 143–145), and this memory intervenes appropriately: promiscuous girls were kept in the church as a kind of public penance. Cf. Niedt’s. *Musicalischer Handleitung* (Hamburg: 1717), pt. 3:36.

that appears to be taken from Daniel Speer's *Schwabische Bauren-Hochzeit* (ex. 12.12)¹⁹⁰:



Ex. 12.12. Daniel Speer, *Kunst-Pfeiffer*, No. 6, mm. 1–4.

Lastly, Bach composes several of these *Peasant Cantata* arias in dance form. The first and last are bourées in which Mattheson sees “something of the grotesque.” Spitta notes that the arias “Ach, es schmeckt doch gar zu gut” (Oh, it tastes so good) and “Ach, Herr Schösser” (Oh, Mr. Schösser) are polonaises. And in *Musicus curiosus, oder Battalus, der vorwitzige Musicant* (*Musicus curiosus, or Battalus, the inquisitive musician*) (1691), attributed to Johann Kuhnau, one of the comic episodes—in which the author weaves the tale of Battalus’s valiant deeds—shows us this hero of concerts at the inn dressed in Hungarian uniform, dancing the polonaise with the waitress, and seducing her. Kirnberger considered the arias “Fünzig Thaler baares Geld” (Fifty dollars ready money) to be a mazurka, and the aria “Und dass ihr’s alle wisst” (And that is all you know) to be none other than a “Rüpeltanz” (rowdy dance).

In being inspired by popular music Bach uses not only the style that is suitable for representing the characters but the one that is suitable for entertaining listeners. Some works such as the comical *Peasant Cantata* are, in fact, addressed to the ordinary public. To be sure, only the performers will distinguish all its subtleties and will even be able to poke fun at those who applaud without understanding everything, but a large part of the merriment still reaches the unsophisticated spectators—those frequenters of performances given at Zimmermann’s café in winter and in its garden in summer. Bach gives them a slightly ribald music to spice up the crude jokes of the libretto, for Picander—its author—does not shy away from vulgarities.¹⁹¹ These peasants readily speak the language of *Hans Wurst*, whose quaintness is interlaced with crudenesses. The harlot in her Sunday best that Picander puts on stage smirks “in the city manner” in an aria all festooned with garlands from a slightly taunting flute—a charming aria in which Bach, in spite of his bias for mockery, does not refrain from being sincerely tender. But do not judge this impudent girl by the costume in which the composer has dressed her: her skillfully embroidered skirt “hides some petticoats that smell of the cowshed.

¹⁹⁰ The bass is to be read an octave lower. This example is taken from the work already cited.

¹⁹¹ His music is rather coarse (compare *Gottsched*, by Waniek, p. 68).

She wants to say how much the ideal of a well-matched couple appeals to her, and she finds herself all stirred up by it, as if a swarm of angry wasps is waging war inside her.” At least she ends with this analogy, which, in itself, expresses her feeling;¹⁹² but the rest very closely resembles Nicolaus Piltz’s song “Die Weiber mit dem Flöhen, die ha’n ein’ steten Krieg” (The women with fleas who wage a constant battle).¹⁹³

We need not be offended by these breaches in tact: Bach consciously emphasizes the noblest words and honors them with small depictions. His taste never obscures the poet’s improprieties: he accepts them as belonging to the very genre with which he is working. Furthermore, crass jokes are too deeply rooted in the German comic tradition for these on the whole rather moderate boldnesses to be repugnant to him. Without going back to the ribald jokes of the 16th century or to Grobianus’s exploits by Dedekind,¹⁹⁴ we still see, very close to Bach, some quite respectable people amusing themselves and letting themselves go by writing certain narratives that would barely appeal to soldiers or students who want to express their cynicism. If you read the adventures of “merry Cotala,” you will be astonished to see that one of the principal means resorted to by the writer to divert his readers is the narration of loathsome scenes. There is a profusion of foul tales in the chapters in which the “joyous ‘musicus instrumentalis’” recounts his apprenticeship. He retained abominable memories, from his time of service to the “Kunst-Pfeiffer” (art piper), that he unabashedly published, and in which he represents the foul labors with which he had been penalized by his master who lived at the top of the town tower. He informs us that he had been obliged to smoke, against his liking, to combat the stinking odor of the loads that he had to carry, and he does not omit a single accident that happened to him when he worked at his repulsive task. He shows us the spattered bürgermeister and the stained tower due to his lazy servant’s clumsiness, and he endlessly recounts tales of high shoes, wading in all the gutters, showing no mercy for any unseemliness and any of the drunkards’ vomit that he comes upon that are similar to, or surpass, the abject things shown by the “maggot painters.” And this heir to the Renaissance men Scarron and Teniers is Johann Kuhnau—identified by someone else, since he was perhaps too ashamed to name himself¹⁹⁵—a widely read scholar¹⁹⁶ from a high

¹⁹² Here is the German text: “Ach, es schmeckt doch gar zu gut. – Wenn ein Paar recht freundlich thut. – Ei, da braust es in dem Ranzen. – Als wenn eitel Floh’ und Wanzen – Und ein tolles Wespenheer – Mit einander zänkisch war!” (Oh, it feels just too good. – When a couple is quite friendly. – Oh, it stirs the stomach. – As if fleas and bugs – And a great army of wasps – were quarreling with one another!)

¹⁹³ August Wilhelm Ambros, *Geschichte der Musik* (1893), 30:408.

¹⁹⁴ The famous book by Friedrich Dedekind, *Grobianus* (1549) was followed by several works of the same cast—quite crass satires on crassness. Moreover, the name *grobianus* (crude or clownish person) was borrowed from Seb. Brant’s *Narrenschiff* (1494).

¹⁹⁵ The novels *Pancalus*, *Battalus*, and *Cotala* that are attributed to Kuhnau are anonymous.

¹⁹⁶ See the preface to Mattheson’s *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*.

status in life, a great musician, and Bach's predecessor at St. Thomas's school in Leipzig.

The lone fact of attributing such fictions to a composer of such high repute as Kuhnau shows us that they do not seem too despicable and that refined society would even tolerate such "lines and gestures" by the stock character "Pickelhäring."

However, Picander's libretto for the *Peasant Cantata* does not contain similar outrages and, recognizing this, Bach never exaggerates when he accompanies it with slightly risqué phrases. He likewise maintains a praiseworthy reserve when he wants to portray drunkenness in the aria written on a "paysanne" (country dance) rhythm. While he expresses sobs and sighs so realistically in the sacred cantatas, he spares us the drunken hiccups here and only points out the foolishness: through several shattering words, he imitates the singsong and nonsensical speech of someone who has been drinking. However, he would not have been afraid of being misunderstood or dishonored if he had stretched his responsibility further, because this era was not offended by drunkenness. In the northern countries, in the 17th century, even the most respectable yielded to the custom. Charles Ogier, who witnessed marriage celebrations at the Danish court, recounts that one of the main guests had conscientiously emptied his glass every time the drums and trumpets sounded the signal to drink to the health of the esteemed figureheads, and he could not wait to get to the door soon enough to keep from soiling himself in the banquet hall.¹⁹⁷

The duke of Rohan contended that the Germans had discovered the perpetual movement "by which they can keep their glasses full." To maintain good order in the *Collegium musicum* founded in Memmingen in 1655, Christoph Schorer, a doctor in the town,¹⁹⁸ reports that it was decided that each member would be entitled to a half-measure of wine paid for by the college's treasury each time they came together, and one would also be able to drink a second half-measure at his own expense, but that beyond this amount of liquid, nothing "whatsoever" would be poured. In Nuremberg in 1687, Maximilien Misson was a guest at a musical performance where the same level of sobriety was not observed. He writes: "We hoped that there would only be singing, but the bread, pepper, salt, and wine were laid out in abundance; no sooner had an aria finished than everyone raised their glasses to drink." The same traveler affirmed that "the Germans are . . . odd drinkers; there is no people in the world more kind, more civil, more obliging; but after a second drink, they have dreadful habits in the matter of drinking: Anything goes while drinking; they drink while doing everything,"¹⁹⁹ etc. The fourth chapter of the comic novel attributed to Kuhnau, *Musicus Magnanimus oder Pancalus*, contains the account of Cotala's wedding. The celebration begins with some

¹⁹⁷ Ogier also complained of the impropriety of the jokes in *Ephemerides, sive Iter danicum, succicum, polonicum*, 1656.

¹⁹⁸ Communicated by Dr. Miedel, to whom I give all my thanks.

¹⁹⁹ Misson, *Nouveau Voyage d'Italie*, from letter dated 1687.

psalms followed by music. Toward the end of the banquet, the “toasts” are drunk to the playing of the instruments, but because of all “the honors,” heads get muddled, and overloaded stomachs revolt. The celebration ends in chaos. Latin and French are spoken, and the prayer of thanksgiving is muddled. At day’s end, the bridegroom, drunk out of his mind, sits down and goes to sleep. Piccola, the bride, has already retired. Pantalus offers to bundle up Cotala and carry him to her, like a babe in swaddling clothes. The mother of the bride, who has had a touch of wine herself, agrees to this folly and directs and encourages it with clownish talk and directions.²⁰⁰

Bach is not a composer of such settings. He would be afraid of failing if he undertook similar celebrations, and he does not want to tax his imagination to evoke such changes in temperament by supplying the literal text with meticulously crafted musical scenes. Favoring dances—even somewhat lively ones—and always ready to create a bass line for even slightly flippant songs, he draws a line at this confusion incited by the aroma of wine. As much as his peasants move about ponderously—I mean this kindly—and as much as they shout impertinent remarks in a harsh voice, Johann Sebastian consents to follow them. But if he allows for their coarse gaiety—even if he is born from the same common stock—and if he is sometimes not far from giving in to the tide of their exaggerations, he refrains from portraying their foolishness and their nonsensical speech. The wise and parsimonious cantor is enemy to all excess that rattles the brain and empties the purse. He remembers the Biblical warning “there is death in the pot.”²⁰¹

How otherwise would he be content with reproducing scenes of such coarse rambling? His comedy is an intellectual sort. You will not wait long before the master is the first to break out and cheer you up: he stays impassive, but he gathers—with a wonderful instinct and method—all the means to make you lose your seriousness. By dint of observing those who laugh, instead of laughing himself, he has created a theory of laughter and his jesting is systematic. He knows the irresistible power of the drollery that comes from giving a mechanical gait to a living being: in a great many cases, his comic songs or his dance arias appear ruled by automatic movements so that the rhythm is exact and the melody is short and ungraceful. He knows how much comic effect there is in repeating, at equal intervals, the same grin or convulsion. In the soprano aria from the *Coffee Cantata* the flute punctuates the singer’s phrases with a short burst of notes that appears to spring from Pan’s own immutable and roguish flute, and the last trio of the same cantata is split up by curt, unison retorts in the strings.²⁰² Bach is not unaware that, to entertain, it never fails to disguise the familiar and solemn, and he injects a very comical stateliness into old Schlendrian’s speech. Furthermore, when he presents

²⁰⁰ Johann Kuhnau, *Musicus magnanimous, oder Pancalus* (Freiburg: 1691), 53.

²⁰¹ 2 Kings: 4: 40 (see the cantata *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten*, BWV 93/5, mm. 12–16).

²⁰² BWV 211/4, mm. 22–38 et seq.; /10, 24–36 et seq.

us with this easy-going tyrant, he has already branded Schlendrian as ridiculous, and his procedure shows us that he has intuited, before Immanuel Kant, one of laughter's laws. In the first recitative where the tenor announces the approach of the "hero in slippers," the basso continuo sounds several notes in a stately rhythm, as if to prepare for a monarch's pompous entrance. However, our expectation is quite fooled. Instead of the magnificent master, a grumbling old man appears—the imaginary despot of the domestic kingdom in which his daughter rules for him. If the composer had stated the theory of his inspiration he would have been able to say, along with Kant: "Das Lachen ist ein Affect aus der plötzlichen Verwandlung einer gespannten Erwartung in Nichts" (Laughter is an affect resulting from the sudden transformation of a heightened expectation into nothing).²⁰³

This thoughtful comedy belongs in particular to the German spirit, like the rough verve we have also pointed out in Bach's works. Together, these two qualities of Germanic disposition that we find traces of here form the basis of his *humor*. We notice in them the results of a scrupulous observation used to create ruthless satire. Rich with experience, Bach laughs knowingly, and his laughing is organized, continuous, and intense. Not only does "he keep a serious demeanor while joking,"²⁰⁴ but he also maintains the ulterior motive of teaching and reforming. He claims to purify taste—if not that of his listeners, at least that of his students—by ridiculing inferior forms of the art. We see him derisively exposing the country fiddlers who accompany awkwardly, like out and out ignoramuses, and he does not steer clear of portraying the most oafish mistakes.²⁰⁵ His biting playfulness hides some stern lessons. Hence, even the laughter he provokes will be instructive: through his music he carries over the efforts of the writers from the *Société fructifère* who had adopted as their motto: "All for the benefit" ("Alles zum Nutzen").

It is in *Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan*²⁰⁶ that we best discover Bach's intentions to criticize and correct. He commits so far fewer faults than composers enslaved by fashion that he borders on defending—against them—the superb and profound art to which he is devoted. Such a challenge as is portrayed in this cantata, in which there is both judge and contestant, enlightens us in a decisive way about his aesthetic. By studying this competition, we clearly distinguish in what way he differs from his contemporaries, what they criticize him for, and what he himself disowns in them; and the foundations of his doctrine become apparent to us.

Actually, if we consider the sequence of events, it is Bach's answer to the attacks lodged against him that presents itself to us first. His cantata is from

²⁰³ Kant, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* (Leipzig: 1878), 1: § 54.

²⁰⁴ Hippolyte Taine, *Notes sur l'Angleterre* (Paris: Hachette, 1872), 344.

²⁰⁵ See the *Coffee Cantata*.

²⁰⁶ BWV 201.

1731,²⁰⁷ and the criticisms launched at him were not published until 1737. Before then, he was hardly ever referred to in public except with praise. However, Mattheson, who reprimanded him, without naming him—on the subject of the declamation of the words in the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*—wrote several years earlier, in 1722, “I have seen some sacred compositions and some instrumental music from the famous Weimar organist, Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach, that are certainly constructed in such a way that we must hold the man in great esteem.”²⁰⁸ Christiane Mariane von Ziegler cites Bach, Telemann, and Handel for their overtures, around 1728.²⁰⁹ And, a little later, Martin Heinrich Fuhrmann declares that the Germans possess “a skillful *Trifolium musicum ex B.* (A musical cloverleaf formed from the letter B) made up of three incomparable virtuosi, whose family name carries a B on their crest; Buxtehude, Bachhelbel (*sic*) and Bach of Leipzig. For me, these three are as valuable as Cicero is to the Romans.”²¹⁰ Two composers, whose autobiographies were published around the same time in Mattheson’s *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, also testify to Bach’s fame. One of them, Johann Francisci (born in 1691) declares that in 1725 he had the good fortune “of hearing and meeting the famous ‘Capellmeister’ Bach and of benefiting from his skill,” and the other, Johann Balthasar Reimann, remembered with delight Bach’s wonderful dexterity.²¹¹

Moreover, this astonishing deftness that many others admired was celebrated by his adversaries themselves. Johann Adolph Scheibe, the author of the diatribe that we are about to examine, begins by recognizing that “Mister XXX is ultimately, in XXX, the most eminent of musicians (‘Musikanten’),” and he adds “He is an extraordinary artist on the clavier and the organ, and I have not met a single musician capable of rivaling him. I have, on different occasions, heard this great man play. One marvels at his ability, and one can scarcely conceive how he is able to cross his fingers and feet so unusually or to extend them to reach the widest intervals without hitting a single wrong note and without shifting his body in spite of this troublesome awkwardness.”

This praise is contained in the so-called letter from a traveling musician that Scheibe presents in the sixth chapter of his collection *Critischer Musikus* (14 May 1737). The disapproval is right there too. “This great man would be the admiration of every nation if his music had more charm and if he did not keep naturalness from his pieces by adding exaggeration and something tangled to them, and if he did not darken their beauty with an excess of craft. Since he thinks with his fingers, his compositions are extremely difficult to perform, for he demands that the singers

²⁰⁷ Johann Mattheson, *Critica musica* (Hamburg: 1722–25), 2:368. [This cantata was composed in 1729 according to Boyd, *Bach*, 270.]

²⁰⁸ Johann Mattheson, *Das beschützte Orchestre* (Hamburg: 1717), 222.

²⁰⁹ Cited by Spitta in *Historische und philologische Aufsätze, Ernst Curtius zu seinem 70ten Geburtstag . . . gewidmet* (Berlin: 1884), 333.

²¹⁰ Fuhrmann, *Die an der Kirchen Gottes gebaute Satans-Capelle* (Cologne: 1729), 55.

²¹¹ See Mattheson’s *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, 79, 292.

and instrumentalists overcome with their voices or instruments the same difficulties that he overcomes on the clavier. But that is impossible. All the ‘mannerisms,’ all the little ornaments—in fact, all we understand in terms of accomplished playing—he expresses formally in every note, and this not only removes the beauty of symmetry from his works, but it also renders the melody unintelligible. In short, he is to music what Lohenstein formerly was to poetry. Pride made both of them descend from the natural to the artificial and from the sublime to the obscure; and we admire the overwhelming work and the extraordinary pains taken by each of them that are nevertheless employed in vain, for they are contrary to all reason.”²¹²

These criticisms must have accrued over a long time. In 1729, Scheibe, the son of a respected organ builder, applied to succeed Christian Gräbner as organist at St. Thomas’s church. Bach was one of the judges of the audition, and Johann Gottlieb Görner surpassed Scheibe, who harbored a lasting resentment against him and the cantor. Since Scheibe frequented the Leipzig literary society that gathered around Gottsched, the disappointed musician, who was also well-read, found no difficulty arguing against Bach. This same group of purists also spoke harshly of Bach’s librettist Christian Friedrich Henrici (Picander). So, in *Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan*, both poet and composer undoubtedly sought to take their revenge against their detractors. Picander found the subject for this lively satire in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (XI, 146–179): Pan, the sylvan deity, challenges Phoebus, the god of the lyre: they choose judges and sing before them to find out who will triumph. King Midas is Pan’s advocate, and Timolus, god of the Lydian Mountains, supports Phoebus who defeats his adversary. Such is the gist of the fable; however, without lingering over all the details of the adaptation of this legend that is prolific with allusions, we must acknowledge the principal cast of characters. We must see Johann Sebastian as Phoebus, and it is quite easy to make out Johann Scheibe in Midas, Pan’s patron. While the poet barely reveals the ups and downs of the dispute and remains somewhat passive, the composer adds to the performance a special humor of a purely musical essence. Everything that Midas and his contestant sing is in a ridiculous style: the vocal figures are stiff, awkward, jerky, crassly accented, and choppy. In the first part of the aria “Zu Tanze, zu Sprunge, so wackelt das Herz” (To dance, to leap, enlivens the heart),²¹³ note the rough palpitations in the orchestra, the little flourishes of the fiddler (for example in measure 61), the singer’s stammer in trying to produce a graphic effect (“wack-ack-ack . . . a-ckelt”). Note also the aria in which Midas proclaims Pan’s victory, lengthily howling his hero’s name at first on a high pitch that he sings nearly every time he repeats this word that already sounds farcical coming out of his mouth and that transforms his obstinate praise into buffoonery. Lastly, in the middle of this aria, note the unison first and second violins, which very ingeniously imitate a

²¹² Johann Adolph Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus* (Leipzig: 1745), 2.

²¹³ BWV 201/7, mm. 16–61 et seq.

donkey's braying—complemented by a snorting from the bass²¹⁴—at the very moment the imprudent king of Phrygia calls upon the judgment of “his two ears” in declaring that “Pan is master.” By evoking the memory of Midas's mishap in this way, the cantor seems to threaten those who, like him, claim to judge music based only upon what they understand, and we could say that Bach wants to tell them: “You decide well enough only according to the impression that reaches your ears—but you have the ears of an ass.”

The satire, in fact, is directed against the dolts—as Franz Liszt called them—who only accept “music that they are familiar with.” Pan's music is music written for the crowd who is amused by it and who pays for it:²¹⁵ “The entire forest admires my singing, and the nymphs, beckoned to dance by my reed pierced with seven well-placed holes that I devised, harmonize the victory with me, uninvited. . . . As soon as my notes fill the air, the mountains thrill and the wild beasts stir.” As for Phoebus Apollo, much to the contrary—assures Pan, who weeps mockingly—no one has ever been able to disentangle his complicated snivelings. “If the sound is too tedious, and he sings as if his lips were bound together, it does not make for any fun” (ex. 12.13):



wenn der Ton zu müß - sam klingt, so er-weeckt es kei - nen Scherz
if the sound is too tedious, it does not make for any fun

und der Mund ge - bun - den singt,
and he sings as if his lips were bound together,

Ex. 12.13. *Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan*, BWV 201/7, mm. 137–147.

This phrase that Pan repeats—with its doleful rhythm²¹⁶ and distorted melodic line²¹⁷—is familiar to us: Bach parodies himself with it. He does not ignore that his melancholy boldness has been reproached, and he pleads guilty, in spite of the promise of the titles in collections where he has included some pieces written to “entertain amateurs”²¹⁸ that are not, in the strict sense of the word, collections of

²¹⁴ BWV 201/11, mm. 100–114. Wilhelm Tappert has not noted this imitation in the last chapter of his *Musikalische Studien* (1868) in which he cites animal cries interpreted by instrumentalists (*Zooplastik in Tönen*). Nor does he cite Mendelssohn (overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and is content merely to mention a passage by C. G. Reissiger (op. 110, no. 8).

²¹⁵ We notice in this cantata the presence of Mercury, the god of commerce, whom we can consider here as the patron of the bourgeois merchant class of Leipzig. Note also that Mercury defends Phoebus's cause with his slightly short-sighted good sense.

²¹⁶ See chapter 3 of this work.

²¹⁷ See exs. 2.43a–c and related text.

²¹⁸ Title of the *Clavier-Übung I* (1730). *Bach Gesellschaft*, vol. 3.

“gallant” pieces whose trivial elegance charms frivolous minds. Even in these pieces he remains aloof, sequestered in a retreat far away from the commonplace. What does it matter to him that the songs preferred by amateurs such as Midas are “lightweight and casual” (“leicht und ungezwungen”)? Bach does not trouble himself with what Scheibe proclaims everywhere—before putting it in print—that guarantees the existence of a “certain principal quality in compositions that allows us to deem them either good or bad” and that this quality is called “naturalness.” To the thoughtless critics who, along with the French, extol this wonderful quality and celebrate music devoid of “all superfluous, overshadowing, and languishing artifice” by allowing only for this simple music that we can remember from the first stroke,²¹⁹ Bach answers that he writes for “those who are good judges of it.” To improvise bright, agile, and bounding melodies can seem a delightful pastime to composers who are content to humor their listeners, but Bach never seeks so much to entice as he does to fascinate. In the cantata we are discussing, Timolus declares: “He who understands art and who sees how your singing develops in a surprising way will be beside himself with rapture when listening to it.” It is not just this expectant listener that Bach wants to win over: his craft is not “too muddled” for Phoebus, for whom he guards the unusual sweetness of his melody—“born of grace,” sings his defender²²⁰—from being guaranteed a crass admiration that would debase him.

Bach and the Style of his Times

It is true that this melody—even if it were concealed by the structure of the composition—would not be liked better by Bach’s contemporaries. Other masters found a language for charming these critics. Johann Friedrich Doles, even though he considers himself to be Bach’s pupil, takes great care in informing the listeners

²¹⁹ Comparing Italian and French opera, J. G. Keyssler writes, in 1730 “. . . Was die *Composition* und absonderlich die *Execution* selbst anlanget, bleiben die Franzosen weit zurück. Dieser ihre Arien sind meistens als *chansons à boire* eingerichtet, und mit so wenigen Veränderungen gesetzt, dass man fast glaubet, man hört immer einerley . . . Wenn eine neue *Opera* aufgeführt wird, und die Fransosen gleich des andern Tages eine *Arie Deutschland, Böhmen. . .*” etc., *Neuste Reisen durch Deutschland* (1751), 1094. Feind already writes, in *Gedanken von der Opera*, on the subject of French opera: “Ueberdem so bestehen ihre Opern meist aus lauter *Recitatif*, und kommen oft in denselben kaum 3 bis 4 *Airs* vor, bey deren *Recitirung* dann das gantze *Auditorium*, so ausser Frauenzimmer, meist in lauter *Abbées* (sic) besteht, mit einstimm, und fleissig nachsingt,” published with the *Deutsche Gedichte* (1708), 90. We understand that the French public could not tolerate arias with too many baffling new embellishments.

²²⁰ See the text of the cantata. Fasch acknowledged, in Bach, that each of the voices alone were meaningful but thought that, together, they produced an unmusical ensemble that was “unsangbar” (inexpressible) (Cf. Gerber, 2nd ed. of his *Lexikon der Tonkünstler*, 2:86).

of his music that, in his contrapuntal works, he does not forget “sweet and touching melody, which he models on the work of Graun and Hasse.”²²¹ Bach’s favorite pupil, Johann Ludwig Krebs, in the inscription to his first work—dedicated to Gottshed’s wife—professes simplicity as being the style of the day.²²²

For Johann Mattheson, melody must be easy, pleasant, clear, and flowing. He systematically examines each of these qualities and proposes some specific rules. He recommends that in order to write “easy” melodies the composer will avoid all that is strained and elaborate, follow nature and custom, imitate the French rather than the Italians, will confine his songs within everyone’s range, and will prefer brevity to length. If the composer wants to succeed in creating pleasing melodies, he must proceed by scale degrees rather than by large intervals, begin on consonant pitches that are well allied with the tonality, etc. He will only achieve a clear melody if he maintains the unity of feeling, does not change the tempo thoughtlessly, observes the laws of structure, leaves aside excessive embellishments, and does not seek to elaborate on scintillating notes but applies himself to producing sounds that speak. Lastly, fluidity of style will only be granted him if he confines himself to a perfectly even rhythm, is tactful in transitions, and if he never misuses chromatic and dissonant motifs, etc.²²³ Through many examples, we have seen that these precepts, or other similar ones, have never had a general value for Bach. For the serious blacksmith of the cantatas, a melody that was governed, tempered, and carefully kept away from all wayward harshness had lost the meaningful energy and unexpected beauty that phrases dictated by passion bring to music. If Johann Sebastian had needed to constrain himself by practicing this polished, guarded, exasperating craft, he would have needed to change not only his language but also his soul. The leaps in his vocal line, his rugged figures, his scooping and crossing lines, his long rages that abate only after he has repeated their threats in fugues of somber lyricism, the tumult and conflict of the voices and their arduous course toward distant harmonies, and what there is of contrast and sometimes of frenzy in his large efforts—what, in Bach, recalls Dürer and his incisive figures, and what recalls Luther and the tragedies of his conscience—all this depends solely on the composer’s interior life, and his art is created only to reflect it.²²⁴ Therefore, we must not be astonished to find his music rugged, tangled, or tense. The master’s mind is dominated by a religion filled with regrets and anguishes, and his experiences of life are nearly all bitter. Lastly, the moral power that exhilarates him also constrains him to fulfilling only the difficult tasks. He wants each of his works to be set forth as a model for his disciples so that their hard-working pride will lead them to follow in his footsteps. He labors to be

²²¹ Robert Eitner cites this passage in *Quellen-Lexikon* (Leipzig: 1900–04), Doles’s article.

²²² Cited by Eitner in *Quellen-Lexikon*, Krebs’s article.

²²³ Mattheson, *Kern melodischer Wissenschaft* (Hamburg: 1737), 32.

²²⁴ “Sein ernsthaftes Temperament zog ihn . . . vornehmlich zur arbeitsamen, ernsthaften, und tiefsinnigen Musik” in Lorenz Mizler’s “Nekrolog,” *Neu eröffnete musikalische Bibliothek* (Leipzig: 1754), 4:171.

an example and to be of the greatest benefit to those who will accept his austere lesson. In this, the motto “Alles zum Nutzen” of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* also seems to rule his heart. If he overwhelms his pupils with the heavy burdens of the nearly unrealizable tasks that he mercilessly assigns them,²²⁵ he only means to treat them as he treats himself. But from this strain that he has inflicted upon himself, his contemporaries have tended to see only his virtuosity, and they have rejected the composer for being an ascetic who has lost his way in his own room. They have not wanted to taste the honey that he brings back from his desert, and they turn away, frightened by the swarming of his wild bees. His most powerful work, the *St. Matthew Passion*, was considered only to be “a very ingenious work by a great master in the art of double counterpoint.”²²⁶ And perhaps the only praise that was ascribed to this composition was that it is, in fact, “incomparable, but that, because of the violence of the passions that we find expressed in it, it is effective in a concert setting (‘in der Kammer’), but not in a church.”²²⁷

In his critique on Bach as “musical performer” (“Musikant”),²²⁸ Scheibe only states then what the majority of amateurs and some composers thought of the harsh composer. The excessive boldness and the manifold vigor of his provocative motifs gave his pieces something far-fetched and bombastic that seemed intolerable. But where does this exaggerated reproach come from, or this comparison with Kaspar von Lohenstein (1635–1683), the tragic poet whose grimacing magniloquence and tolerance for the frightful are shown in freakish scenes in the midst of a clash of words from which springs the spark of new metaphors, daring liberties, and flashing antitheses?²²⁹ In comparing Bach to Lohenstein, the classical art purists who follow Gottsched do not deny, though, that the cantor tries to be an expressive composer, but they condemn his lack of expressive simplicity. They would readily borrow these ironic lines from Rameau’s enemies by re-casting them to apply to Bach: “If the difficult is beautiful, then Rameau is a great man.”

These purists got lost in Bach’s pieces in which each part has a vivid personality instead of adhering to the principle in which “All the voices must work with each other, the difficulty being the same for each of them: one does not recognize a solo part in them.” Moreover, this music, as a whole, seemed to the

²²⁵ Charles Burney recalls that C. P. E. Bach had harbored a rather bitter memory of his studies with his father in *De l’état présent de la musique en Allemagne* (Genoa: 1810), 3: 225.

²²⁶ We can at least believe that it is to this work that Marpurg alludes in these accounts in his *Legende einiger Musikheiligen* (Breslau: 1786).

²²⁷ Mizler, *Neu eröffnete Musikalische Bibliothek*, 4:109.

²²⁸ Birnbaum rightly considers this title as insulting.

²²⁹ On Lohenstein, see Bobertag’s study, included in his works (vol. 36 of Kürschner’s collection); cf. also *Deutsches Theater*, edited by Tieck (1817), vol. 2. Lohenstein delighted in descriptions of death, and this predilection was also recognized by A. Gryphius. We have seen that Bach readily emphasizes funereal ideas.

purists rough and uncomfortable (“Annehmlichkeit”),²³⁰ and the abundance of dissonant chords irritated them. In defending him, Bach’s champion, Abraham Birnbaum, had to note that music’s real “agreeableness” comes from the alternations of consonances and dissonances and that without this diversity of sounds it would be impossible to express the different passions—the sad ones in particular. So, it was undoubtedly through this sustained and, so to speak, assertive melancholy that Bach distanced himself from the style loved by the men of his day. When they happened to steer themselves among the branches of the thorny forest in which he roamed—wounded—it was to see, under the brambles, one of the doleful faces such as sculptors had created in bygone days and such as one no longer dared to gaze upon. Some said that the composer had extracted the cry out of mute and clenched mouths, and the great lamentation of the middle ages arose from his dense music as if it had given speech back to the statues of people that inhabit the shadows of gothic cathedrals. Moreover, did not Bach work in the manner of a mason from these contemptible times? Scheibe says: “We still have gothic compositions in music. The Goths have not disappeared from music, although the works of our best masters are inspired by reason and naturalness. We see certain composers who glorify themselves by writing in an unintelligible and unnatural way. They pile up figures, create bizarre embellishments, and put so much subtlety into the music that they no longer understand it themselves. As a result, they constantly distance themselves from the natural and from the purposes of their pieces. Are they not true musical Goths?”²³¹ Coming from Scheibe, this must refer to Bach. He is quite clearly described, since the defects the writer finds in gothic compositions are the same defects that he finds in Bach. We know enough about how the French of classical taste consider gothic buildings and how the Germans influenced by the French school condemn with the same severity this art that is nevertheless so revealing of the uneasiness in their souls. In this debate, the Leipzig critics reproach Bach for going against nature because they themselves have forgotten the characteristics of their own natures. They have become strangers to their own country’s spirit. Besides, how would they praise qualities in the cantor that they take the wrong way? When he is solemn, they judge him dull; when patient, elaborate; when emotional, strained. They hardly recognize any other merit in him than the agile pursuit of the “black cloud”²³² of wrangling notes. In so many

²³⁰ Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus*, 62, 884.

²³¹ Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus*, 755 n.

²³² Stölzel congratulated himself that, in learning composition under Umblauft, his study had not been pushed too far in such a way that “mir Raum blieb, durch das Schwarze Notengewölcke ungehindert nach der Sonne der ‘Melodie’ blicken zu können” (that I leave space through the black cloud of notes according to the sunny melody) (*Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, 343).

other people's eyes he is mostly a sort of pedant with a stern countenance²³³ who makes a show of tiresome knowledge, is easily angered—like a man of little refinement²³⁴—and readily assumes the pretentious or weepy tone of a village preacher.

Conclusion

Bach's lofty intentions therefore remain hidden from the common folk who do not know that he created his work to serve as an example for his pupils and as an exhortation to Christians, for he never writes solely to entertain the masses. Through Phoebus's voice he seems to declare—in the *Dramma per Musica* that we have been examining—that he sings for “the gods' pleasure.” His art is sacred, and, like Johann Kuhnau, his predecessor at St. Thomas's school, he must have reflected on this phrase by Saint Bernard that Kuhnau had remembered in his book, *Der musicalische Quack-Salber*: “Si sic cantas ut placeas Populo magis quam Deo, vel ut ab alio laudem quaeras, vocem tuam vendis et facis eam non tuam, sed suam” (If you sing to please people rather than God, or you ask the praise of another man, you sell your voice and you sing not your own song but his).²³⁵ Johann Sebastian had not wanted to “sell his voice”: so severe and determined, it prophesied by divulging the soul's most heart-rending secrets. Emancipated from his century by his pride in serving only God, free from the tutelage of masters but willing heir to the greatest of them, and only seeking within himself the laws of his eloquence, Bach came to write, movingly and profoundly, the unique gospel in all of music. His passionate diligence, his genius for intriguing combinations,²³⁶ and his spiritual asceticism have made him write in a bitter and difficult language whose very splendor contains something superhuman. I hope that the foregoing work can give those who are still disheartened by the severity of Bach's outer layer the informed daring needed for cracking what Schütz called “the hard nut” of austere counterpoint that seems to envelop Bach's work but that nonetheless allows his thinking to show through so clearly. They will recognize then, beneath the cantor's plain robe, the expressive master and the fierce and impassioned precursor of Beethoven and Richard Wagner.²³⁷

²³³ See an anecdote recalled by Zelter and cited in W. Cart's excellent book *Étude sur J. S. Bach* (1899), 254.

²³⁴ We know of his anger against one inept accompanist (Spitta, *J. S. Bach*, 2:743).

²³⁵ Kuhnau, *Der musicalische Quack-Salber*, ed. Benndorf (Berlin: 1900), 256.

²³⁶ However, Bach never accepted that one composed in a dry and mechanical manner or created “wooden” fugues. He did not seek to treat music as a mathematical knowledge (Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, 231).

²³⁷ In the course of this study, I have very often compared Bach to his German forerunners. In his work it is easy to detect his memory of the masters who came before him, and I will return later to this question. Only several indications can be included here. Therefore, note

that the “piano” endings in the *Actus tragicus* and in the last chorus of the cantata *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt* (BWV 68/5) are a trait of the German style and, I would readily say, of German piety (cf. Gletle, *Anima Christi*, Bibliothèque Nationale, vol. 1, 1187; Bockshorn, collection of 1659, no. 2; J. R. Ahle, *Es ist genug*, ed. cited; J. P. Krieger, ed. cited). – The accompaniment of repeated notes that Bach gives the organ chorale *Erbarm’ dich mein, o Herre Gott* (BWV 721) has undoubtedly been inspired for him by Kuhnau, who depicts the fear in the Israelite’s prayer by inserting the chorale *Aus tiefer Not* into his first biblical sonata, which is also accompanied with repeated notes. Note also the alto aria with cello obbligato in the cantata *Wachet! betet!*, whose theme is already found in a gigue by Reussner (1675); and by Guth we find a chaconne bass line that foreshadows the bass line from the chorale *In dir ist Freude*; Johann Fischer, in *Himmlische Seelen-lust* (1686), no. 4, forms a motif that will reappear in the *English Suites*. Lastly, for the themes drawn from Froberger or J. K. F. Fischer, we can consult the work cited by Seiffert (*Geschichte der Klaviermusik*).

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Boyd.—Trans.].

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